

Commentary

November 2002

Jihad and the Professors

Daniel Pipes

Russia's Revolution

Leon Aron

Judaism Beyond Words: Part 3

David Gelernter

Paying for Jefferson's Sins

Algis Valiunas

You Could Also Love a Rich Girl—A Story

Joseph Epstein

Fishing for Cancer

David Schoenbrod

9/11/02

Michael J. Lewis

Terry Teachout

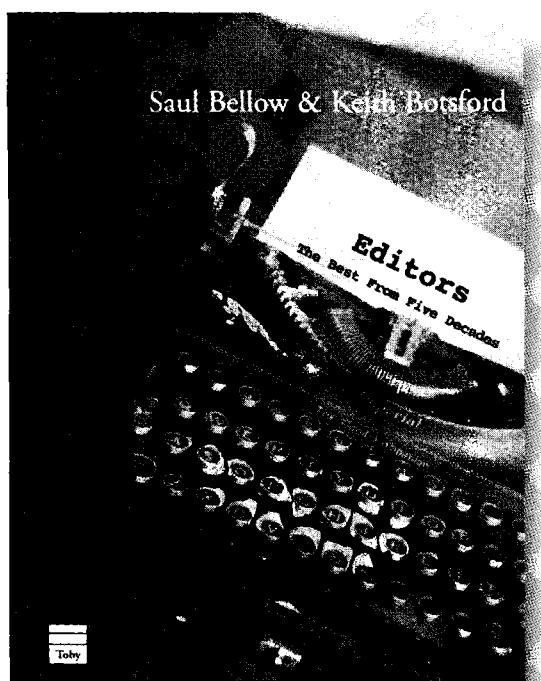
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Letters from Readers

Riyadh & Us

TO THE EDITOR:

In taking aim at the U.S.-Saudi partnership ["Our Enemies, the Saudis," July-August], Victor Davis Hanson writes as if he is shocked by the discovery of a monster in his own backyard. Yet he offers no workable proposals for how to tame or even, if need be, to destroy it.

Mr. Hanson asserts that we must abandon our dependency on Saudi energy reserves, and argues that this will happen once we liberate Baghdad from Saddam Hussein and help develop Russian oil production. But global demand over the coming generation will require all the output that the oil-producing states can provide. It is misleading to imply that the output of Saudi Arabia or of any other Gulf state will somehow become inconsequential. American policies aimed at defending global access to the energy sources of the Persian Gulf, in-

cluding Saudi Arabia, remain valid.

Mr. Hanson insinuates that the Bush administration has lied to the American people about Saudi cooperation with our efforts to block the financing of terrorism. But Washington *has* received cooperation from Riyadh in tracking the money that has been reaching al Qaeda from Saudi donors. Last October, Riyadh quietly sent officials from its ministry of finance and central bank to meet with U.S. Treasury officials and discuss how to create a system to monitor Saudi charitable foundations and block funding for al Qaeda. These efforts continue today, which is probably why Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill and other cabinet officers state that Saudi cooperation has been satisfactory.

We have not yet found a way to work with Saudi Arabia on the basic problems arising from the spread of militant Islamic fundamentalism around the world. Before September 11 neither

Washington nor Riyadh adequately appreciated the indirect consequences of the Saudis' evangelism abroad. The Saudi government is proud of its financial support for spreading the practice of Wahhabi Islam through religious schools and mosques. But it is simplistic to argue, as Mr. Hanson does, that this financing reflects a Saudi intent to encourage international terror and radical anti-Americanism.

As for failing to foresee consequences, Washington played a significant role in helping inflame the spirit of holy war among Arabs and other Muslims during the 1980's by lavishly supporting the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan against the Soviet army. To advance our anti-Communist policy, we pushed Riyadh to match dollar-for-dollar our investment in that war. Once the Soviets withdrew in 1989, we walked away, leaving a vacuum that the Taliban and al Qaeda eventually filled.

There are tough problems

facing the Saudi-American relationship. To reach agreement on reforming that country's educational system and how it performs its role as a leading propagator of Islam will require skill and sensitivity. Mr. Hanson's call to stimulate destabilization, "if not outright chaos," in Saudi Arabia will not bring changes favorable to American interests. His chosen means—to find or help create dissidents committed to democracy—has emotional appeal, but it will not lead to the safer world that all of us would like to see.

RICHARD W. MURPHY
U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, 1981-83
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Victor Davis Hanson's call for a U.S. policy "seeking to spark disequilibrium, if not outright chaos," in Saudi Arabia is not only irresponsible but downright dangerous to America's vital interests. Saudi Arabia's culture and values are so different from our own

that Americans often find it difficult to understand the strategic value of our relationship. Yet the United States has always had important allies that were neither Western nor democratic.

Saudi Arabia holds a quarter of the world's oil reserves and, along with the other Gulf states, two-thirds of the world's oil supply. The special relationship established between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in 1944 has worked well for both countries, and has provided a degree of global energy security, especially during the cold war. Saudi Arabia has consistently demonstrated that its decisions on oil policy are intended to stabilize markets and prices in cooperation with the United States.

Because it is a tribal society that follows a strict interpretation of the Qur'an, Saudi Arabia sometimes appears secretive and inaccessible to Americans. Certainly, the events of September 11 raise serious and unavoidable questions for the Saudis themselves about the evolution of their society. Their challenge is how to become a modern Islamic state in a globalized world. They must also explore why a militant and violent ideology appeals to some of their citizens.

Still, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia need each other as strategic allies. The two countries have cooperated closely on energy security, Arab-Israeli peace, regional stability, and South Asia, and the relationship has endured for decades, through several global and regional crises. Incremental change in Saudi Arabia is inevitable and should be encouraged by the United States.

JUDITH KIPPER
*Center for Strategic &
International Studies
Washington, D.C.*

TO THE EDITOR:

It is sad that COMMENTARY has published Victor Davis Hanson's deplorable and inaccurate article. Mr. Hanson displays a total ignorance of the vast progress Saudi Arabia has made in recent decades and of the ways its standard of living has improved. Indeed, no state in Europe or the Americas has accomplished as much.

In Saudi Arabia, some \$14 billion a year—a quarter of the country's annual budget—is allotted to education. There are eight universities and over 24,000 schools, colleges, and vocational training centers. The country now has over 300 hospitals with 45,000 beds and 32,000 doctors (a quarter of whom are Saudi nationals). And the Saudi government has changed the country from a desert kingdom into one of the most modern states in the world, building fifteen cities and 300 villages with sewage, water, and electrical services.

Saudi Arabia is a democratic country according to Islamic law. Its constitution is the holy Qur'an and the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), which guarantee the rights of its citizens. The Qur'an and *hadith* respect Judaism and Christianity, and contain the principles of human rights, put in place 1,400 years before the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Saudi Arabia has a king, elected by the council of the royal family, and a crown prince, both of whom, for a few days each week, meet any citizen who wishes to see them. At 10 a.m. every day, cabinet ministers must meet any citizen who comes to their ministries presenting petitions, which are taken care of in due time. Can any U.S. citizen meet

the President or cabinet secretaries whenever he wishes? The best of democracy is not elections, but the protection of the rights of citizens and the government's accomplishments in their behalf.

Mr. Hanson states that the anti-Saudi Arabian terrorist Osama bin Laden is "a naturalized Saudi Arabian." In fact, Osama bin Laden was born in Saudi Arabia to a Yemeni father. But the Saudi government deprived him of his citizenship and made it illegal for any Saudi, including members of his family, to send him money. Saudi Arabia made efforts to have bin Laden extradited from Sudan and Afghanistan long before the U.S. treated him with adequate seriousness. That some of his followers are Saudi nationals is of great concern to the government of Saudi Arabia, just as the U.S. is concerned that some of his followers are native-born Americans.

Mr. Hanson also echoes the much-distorted view that Saudi Arabia finances religious schools in various countries. But Saudi Arabia did not finance even one such school in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. And while it is true that Saudi Arabia has published and distributed copies of the Qur'an around the world and has helped finance the construction of schools and mosques in other countries, it does not in any way interfere with the curricula of these schools or the freedom of their imams.

Another totally gross distortion is Mr. Hanson's charge that Saudi Arabia's "present government has been an active abettor of terror." Saudi Arabia condemns and opposes terrorism, and has made it clear that any violent act against unarmed civilians anywhere

is contrary to true Islamic beliefs. Similarly, to call Saudi Arabia "the most virulent anti-Israeli Arab country in the region" is ridiculous, since Saudi Arabia proposed the first practical peace proposal to enable Israel and Palestine to live side by side. COMMENTARY may be sued for libel for printing Mr. Hanson's malicious statement calling the Saudis "international criminals who would destroy the West."

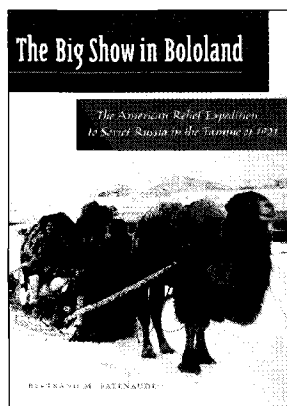
Finally, Mr. Hanson's stupid theories about Saudi Arabia's role as the world's biggest producer and exporter of oil prove that he is an evil man who opposes the best interests of the United States. All reasonable American citizens greatly appreciate the cooperation of Saudi Arabia in these matters. Only bigoted Zionist agents attack the oil policy of Saudi Arabia.

ISSA NAKHLEH
*Legal Advisor to the Saudi
Arabian Mission to the UN
New York City*

TO THE EDITOR:

Victor Davis Hanson fails to understand that the cause of all the terrorism directed toward the U.S. from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere is the occupation of Palestine by Israel. For decades the Arab world has been watching the occupation while the U.S. has provided weapons to Israel and vetoed every UN resolution meant to help the Palestinians. Double standards seem to be the name of the game in U.S. foreign policy. Kuwait was occupied and then liberated within months. Palestine was occupied, but there has still been no action in over 30 years. It is sad to know that a mighty country like the U.S. can be hijacked by members of a minority race—Jews, obvi-

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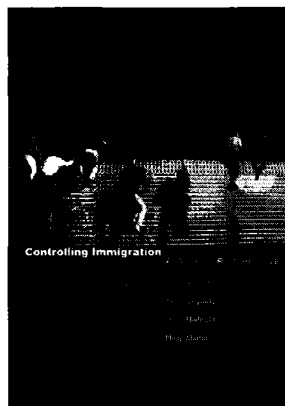
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ously—for their own selfish interests.

ASIF HANIF
Rajarbagh, Bangladesh

TO THE EDITOR:

In recommending strong-er ties with the states of the former Soviet Union as a means of breaking America's dependence on Saudi oil, Victor Davis Hanson apparently assumes that Russia and Kazakhstan, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, represent Western values that deserve to be promoted. Nothing could be further from the truth. Kazakhstan is as much of a kleptocracy as Saudi Arabia, and Russia's actions in Chechnya demonstrate daily that its supposed acceptance of Western standards of human rights is a sham. It is certainly a good idea to move away from relying on the Saudis, but handing over the leverage they now enjoy to the criminalized cliques of the former USSR would be a bad mistake.

CHRISTOPHER LORD
St. Pierre en Vaux, France

TO THE EDITOR:

I agree with Victor Davis Hanson's condemnations of the Saudis but not with his prescriptions for U.S. action. Mr. Hanson claims that in order to make the Saudi government move toward openness, freedom, tolerance, modernization, and friendlier relations with the West, we should shut off the current flow of American dollars by developing sources of non-Saudi oil.

That, however, is a prescription for creating another Iran. If we stop the flow of American money to the inept Saudi regime, it will not be able to survive in an already hostile environment and will eventually collapse or be overthrown. In its place

may arise a truly loathsome and implacably anti-American fundamentalist Islamic regime like Iran's. That "solution" will be far worse than the manageable problem we now have.

JACK BETHUNE
Sarasota, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

Yes, Saudi Arabia has been led by a duplicitous bunch responsible for spreading hatred, fear, and intolerance throughout the world. And yes, it is high time to change our policy toward the Saudi rulers to make it as difficult as possible for them to continue to spread their vitriol. But we surely do harm by calling the Saudis "our enemies." It gives Saudi rulers justification for their behavior, and is likely to alienate others. Better to separate the ruling monarchs from the people and make effective use of the observation Victor Davis Hanson makes at the end of his piece: where governments hate us most, the people tend to like us more.

BRIAN FORST
*American University
Washington, D.C.*

TO THE EDITOR:

As usual, Victor Davis Hanson provides a depressingly clear picture of a subject that has been shrouded in misunderstanding. There can be no doubt that the Saudi regime is inimical to the interests of the United States. But the prescriptive parts of Mr. Hanson's argument seem incomplete. We responded to attacks arising from Afghanistan by declaring its leaders criminals and virtually conquering the country. And though he does not state it explicitly, it seems that Mr. Hanson would recommend similar treatment of Iraq. Why then,

according to Mr. Hanson, should we not conquer Saudi Arabia, dissolve the House of Saud, imprison its leaders, and administer the land and its oil fields until a civilized indigenous leadership arises?

DANIEL RUBIN
Miami Beach, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

Victor Davis Hanson understates the threat to the Saudi royal family of a successful U.S. invasion of Iraq. I simply cannot see Prince Abdullah and his 30,000 thieves surviving after we watch a million Iraqis celebrating their freedom in Baghdad.

NATHAN D.
WIRTSCHAFTER
Encino, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Just over a year ago, Victor Davis Hanson's article would have appeared outrageous. It is a measure of the enormity of the events of September 11 that it now comes across as well-argued and full of common sense. Today we have a clearer picture of how much the House of Saud has done that is prejudicial to U.S. interests.

Before September 11, it was obvious that Riyadh had made a deal with Tehran over the investigation of the 1996 Khobar bombing in Saudi Arabia in which nineteen American servicemen died. By blocking U.S. investigations, the Saudis secured an Iranian promise of no more bombings on their own soil and a compromise on oil policy that reversed a plummeting price.

But there was also, we now know through U.S. intelligence, a second pact with a second devil. Following an explosion in 1995 at a Saudi national-guard facility in

Riyadh in which five Americans were killed, senior Saudi princes began paying off Osama bin Laden, whose men were thought to be responsible. As a result, subsequent bombs went off elsewhere—at the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and alongside the USS *Cole* in the Yemeni port of Aden.

The Saudis may or may not have known about the plans for September 11, but they *were* financing them. There is probably enough money left to finance the next al Qaeda attack as well.

SIMON HENDERSON
*Saudi Strategies
London, England*

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON
writes:

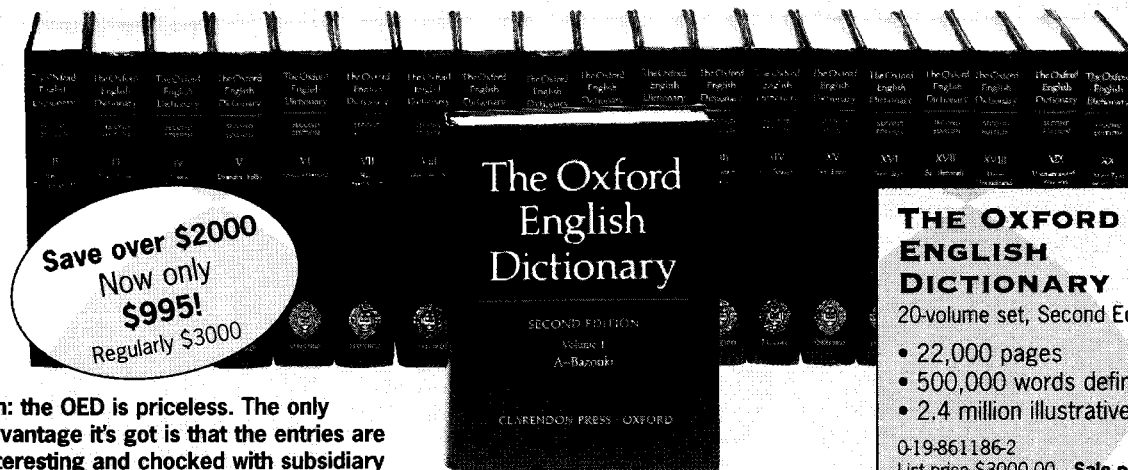
For over a half-century, our alliance with Saudi Arabia has been an American institution. Its tripartite foundation—anti-Communism, uninterrupted oil, and enormous arms sales—has been as unquestioned by our government as it has proved satisfying to a few thousand members of the Saudi royal family and a legion of American ex-diplomats, arms merchants, think-tankers, and consultants. So strong has this commitment been that elements of Saudi society quite odious to Americans have by needs been ignored: sexual apartheid, Wahhabi fundamentalism, virulent anti-Semitism, and subsidies for terrorist groups.

The events of September 11 changed all that. Given the role of Saudi citizens, both overt and complicit, in the planning and commission of the monstrous acts in New York and Washington, Americans of all sorts are slowly beginning to reexamine this complex and dangerous relationship. They seek to ask

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previously taboo questions, both moral and pragmatic, that are not easily answered. In both countries, elite apologists of the old business-as-usual school have much to lose should the present Saudi regime be either radically reformed or ended, or its relationship with the United States altered. And thus it is useful for us to see their hysterics formally presented in print.

An alarmed Richard W. Murphy apparently did not read the article I wrote. I was not "shocked" or unaware of the "monster" of Saudi Arabia, but, in common with other observers, I have been exasperated for years by our unquestioned, static, and intimate relationship with a regime so antithetical to the basic values of this country. Well before Mr. Murphy's tenure in Saudi Arabia, it was clear that our oil dependency was propping up a kingdom whose skyrocketing birthrates, declining per-capita income, endemic corruption, and unbending despotism fueled rather than impeded radical Islamism. Some of us hoped that the end of the cold war and the growing diversity in the global oil market might suggest to realists in our diplomatic corps that there was now a chance for new and more imaginative initiatives. As deadly events would prove, our hopes were utterly in vain.

Contrary to Mr. Murphy, I did not propose that a sane Iraq and a more productive Russia would make Gulf oil "inconsequential." What I wrote was that such considerations—along with conservation, greater commitment to domestic exploration, and use of alternative fuels—would begin the necessary and difficult process

of reducing American reliance on autocracies like the Saudi kingdom and thereby allow us greater flexibility to abandon the disastrous policies that Mr. Murphy and others helped to craft or maintain.

Nor did I "insinuate" that the Bush administration had "lied" about the level of Saudi succor in tracing the multifarious links of Middle Eastern terrorism. Saudi intransigence is a matter of record. Apart from the avalanche of published complaints about Saudi obduracy, Mr. Murphy himself, no stranger to the language of diplomatic equivocation, unknowingly makes my case by quoting Secretary O'Neill's dry assessment of "satisfactory" Saudi help in tracking down mass murderers. Three thousand Americans are vaporized by an ally's citizenry, and we're supposed to be pleased that we can give their investigatory efforts a grade of C?

That American methods vis-à-vis a nuclear and murderous Soviet Communism were sometimes less than noble in the past—and particularly in Afghanistan—is not under dispute, but nevertheless instructive in ways Mr. Murphy does not appreciate. The demise of the Soviet Union opened up just the sort of principled stance that Mr. Murphy appears to yearn for in retrospect—and evidently shuns in prospect.

As far as security and democracy go, Americans need worry far less about Turks, Qataris, Hamid Karzai's once fierce countrymen, and Muslims in India (as opposed to those in neighboring Pakistan) than they do Saudis. In such places, Islamic peoples have some chance to participate in governments that enjoy far greater legitimacy. Indeed,

we have learned that fundamentalism thrives best under autocracies, where it distorts the frustrations of disenfranchised citizens and is in turn either manipulated or bribed by a fearful and unpopular government.

In a tone similar to Richard W. Murphy's, Judith Kipper, a long-time Washington insider, reminds us that the Saudis' customs are "different" from our own, which no doubt explains why Saudi Arabia "sometimes appears secretive and inaccessible to Americans." Secretive they may appear to us yokels in the heartland, but after September 11 they are hardly inaccessible. And so I take issue with every point Judith Kipper makes, and find her own reasoning both "dangerous" and "irresponsible."

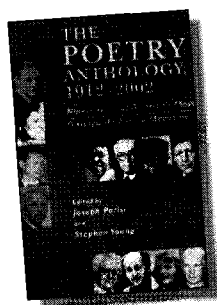
Where she sees Saudi help in defusing the Middle East crisis, I see the most virulent state-subsidized anti-Semitism in the Middle East and substantial funds given to reward suicide murders of Israeli innocents. She outlines a valuable strategic and military relationship; I think hundreds of Americans could die in Iraq because we may be barred from using a vast base on Saudi territory against an enemy that would once have overrun the Saudi kingdom itself had it not been for American troops. She underscores cooperation in matters of petroleum policy; I am more worried about embargoes, past and future, the use of petroleum-garnered dollars diverted to terrorists, and vast wealth in the hands of a tiny clique that is increasingly despised by its own increasingly impoverished people.

Judith Kipper's advocacy of only "incremental" changes in Saudi Arabia is interesting-

ly echoed in Issa Nakhleh's semi-official communiqué. Mr. Nakhleh's diatribe is edifying, and both Richard Murphy and Judith Kipper should read it carefully. His Orwellian assertion that the kingdom's "standard of living has improved" is representative of much else in his letter, and tells it all.

Improved for whom? In fact, the per-capita wealth of Saudi Arabia has plunged by two-thirds in the last two decades alone. Whatever laudable elements of social infrastructure may exist, the billions spent on "education" give as much cause to shudder as to applaud when we remind ourselves that Saudi state schools and curricula, from the *madrassas* to the universities, are censored, laced with fundamentalism, and thoroughly anti-American and anti-Semitic in tone. What was so disturbing about the profile of many of the 9/11 murderers was not their ignorance but, precisely, the nature of their education.

I would also pause over Mr. Nakhleh's use of the word "modern," as well as his unintentionally comic phrase, "democratic country according to Islamic law." Such nomenclature, *mutatis mutandis*, has served most despotisms of the last century, regimes that have been at once "modern" and enslaved. But democracy, *pace* Mr. Nakhleh, is a definable term, not a relative construct, and the same goes for human rights: though Mr. Nakhleh may associate the Qur'an and the *hadith* with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both the UN and the U.S. State Department have cited the Saudis' nonsecular courts for imposing floggings, amputations, and beheadings, as

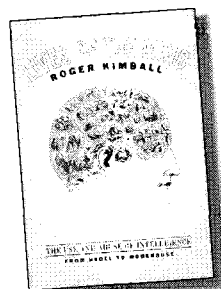
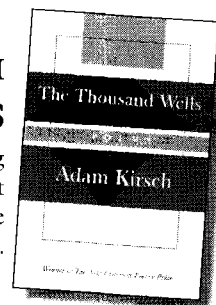


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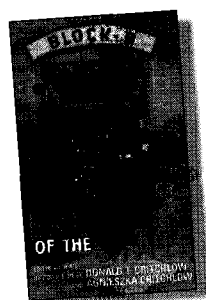
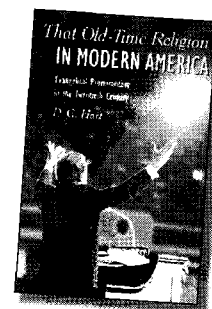


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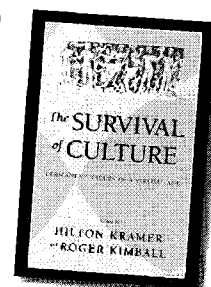


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well as the forced segregation of women.

But, really, what more can one say? Mr. Nakhleh gives the game away with his throwaway but seemingly obligatory phrase, "bigoted Zionist agents." At this point, discussion must end.

Little more need be added in the case of Asif Hanif's letter, which once again invokes the Jews and their vast conspiracy. Still, I do not think it wise of Mr. Hanif to raise the example of Kuwait—not after the United States spent blood and treasure to liberate it from neighboring murderous Muslims, only to see Kuwait ethnically cleanse tens of thousands of its own Palestinians and now, according to polls, loudly declare its displeasure with *our* alleged insensitivity toward the Palestinians. If there is logic there, I decline to follow it.

I share Christopher Lord's concern about the former Soviet Union, but I did not "assume" the presence of enlightened Western values there. Instead, I stressed two points. Given our own present state of vulnerability and the nature of the global energy market, we have no power to "hand over" leverage to any one state. But helping the former Soviet republics develop their reserves is wise on a number of grounds. By diversifying the market, it might help obviate the type of insidious relationship we now embrace with certain suspect exporting countries. It is also a way of implicitly recognizing those republics of the former Soviet Union that do allow elections, and in which vicious or undemocratic practices are susceptible of amelioration. The fact that the states of the former Soviet Union can handle some

of the domestic development of their reserves on their own, and are less parasitic on Western expertise, likewise reduces the need for the incestuous relations that have grown up between so many thousands of Americans and the Saudis, with all the attendant effects on American foreign policy.

Jack Bethune, like Christopher Lord, seems to believe we can control the world's oil market. We cannot—and thus can neither "shut off" nor "hand over" much of anything until we get our own energy house in order.

My point was different: for both practical and moral reasons, we should attempt to create a climate in which Saudi oil does not dominate the world market and American petro-dollars are not used to promote terrorism abroad and to tighten the grip of domestic repression.

Mr. Bethune's evocation of Iran is interesting. Like Saudi Arabia, it, too, may well be on the brink of revolution. But what follows surely will not be an Islamist state; the mullahs there, like the Taliban in Afghanistan, have proved that theocrats cannot garner long-term public support. Similarly, the way to deter their brethren in Saudi Arabia is not through bribery, appeasement, or stealthy encouragement but rather in the harsh light of an open society and reform. Only in that way can the populace be held responsible for its own errors should it vote to embrace medievalism rather than consensual government.

I also disagree with Mr. Bethune that the Saudi situation is "manageable." Had fifteen Iranians—under the tutelage of an Iranian multi-millionaire, with once-close

family ties to the Iranian government—murdered 3,000 Americans, I think it would have been far easier either to demand accountability from Tehran or seek redress through military force. Overt enemies are sometimes less dangerous and more "manageable" than duplicitous "friends."

As Brian Forst reminds us, we have learned that we are more liked by Middle Easterners whose autocratic governments we do not support. I certainly did not mean to suggest that we should be indiscriminately hostile to the Saudi people. Rather, I urged that we seek reformers among the Saudis themselves, including enlightened members of the royal family, who must not only liberalize their government but address problems in Saudi society that they no longer have the luxury to profess are none of anyone's business but their own. I still naively believe that some elite and educated Saudis will be watching harbingers in post-bellum Iraq with interest and approval rather than only fear and anxiety.

Daniel Rubin, like many exasperated Americans, wishes a prompt and armed response to the perfidy of the kingdom, but I am afraid that at the present moment this would be utterly disastrous for reasons both moral and practical. The ultimate purpose of my article was not to advocate such a precipitous use of force but, for the sake of avoiding future bloodshed, to urge the necessity of fundamental change in our relationship with Saudi Arabia and/or fundamental change in the kingdom itself. For good or ill, as Nathan D. Wirschafter points out, an invasion of Iraq may be catalytic toward one or the oth-

er of those ends. This is a good reason for both the kingdom and our own Saudi lobby to begin a reassessment, not "incrementally," as Judith Kipper would like, but radically and immediately—if possible, before the removal of Saddam Hussein.

I have little to add to Simon Henderson's astute and informed appraisal, for which I thank him.

La Question Juive

TO THE EDITOR:

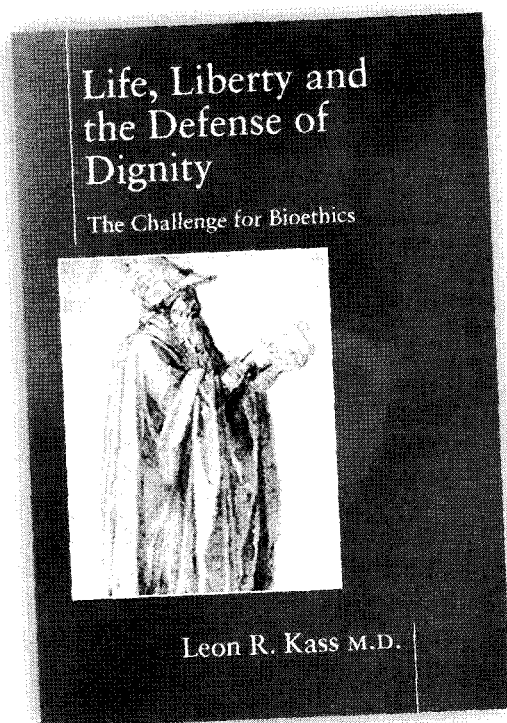
Michel Gurfinkiel's article on French anti-Semitism is more balanced than most of what has been written on the subject ["France's Jewish Problem," July-August]. But in claiming that the September 11 terrorist attacks "generated a wave of pride among French Muslims," he makes an unjustified generalization. In a study done by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique, 92 percent of French Muslims agreed with the statement that "a Muslim should not rejoice at these attacks because Islam condemns such acts," and 90 percent agreed that "the perpetrators of these attacks should not call themselves Muslims because Islam is a religion of peace and moderation."

SVANTE LUNDGREN
Turku, Finland

TO THE EDITOR:

Michel Gurfinkiel fails to make an important distinction when he claims that "most of the violence against [Jews] stemmed from the French Muslim community." The French Muslims responsible for the attacks are the unassimilated and segregated ones. The others, who

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have become loyal citizens, have nothing to do with anti-Semitism.

As for comparisons to Nazi Germany, Mr. Gurfinkiel is similarly ignorant. He claims that "it took no more than five years [from 1928] . . . for Germany to become the most murderously anti-Semitic nation in history." Apart from the absurdity of believing that an entire people can change so quickly, Mr. Gurfinkiel ignores the fact that Hitler's greatest frustration was his inability to convert the vast majority of Germans to his psychosis. As Sarah Gordon shows in *Hitler, Germans, and the "Jewish Question"* (1984), before 1933, a third of card-carrying Nazis gave "no evidence" of anti-Semitism. Moreover, even after five years of being flooded with anti-Semitic propaganda, Germans reacted with such revulsion to Kristallnacht in November 1938 that Goebbels had to curtail it and instruct the press to report what had happened only on the local news page without mentioning what had happened in other cities.

FRANZ MARTIN
OPPENHEIMER
Falls Village, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR:

After lamenting how the Holocaust has been turned into a "universal" tragedy, Michel Gurfinkiel arrives at the amazing conclusion that contemporary French anti-Semitism is *not* a manifestation of classical hatred of Jews, in the racist or neo-Nazi sense. Rather, it is a "postmodern or postliberal development . . . on the frontline of what Samuel Huntington has termed the clash of civilizations."

Really? If the anti-Semitic incidents he cites

had been directed not against French Jews but against French Catholics, would the French government have remained as passive and restrained toward its Muslim population? I doubt it. Despite the dangers of confronting a large and growing Muslim population, the reaction would have been swift and vigorous. It is not a "clash of civilizations" that Mr. Gurfinkiel is experiencing in France, but merely the newest chapter in the same old story of Jew-hatred.

YAFFA GANZ
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

The recent attacks on Jews in France may have come mainly from its large population of Muslim immigrants, as Michel Gurfinkiel documents, but a fertile soil for anti-Semitism has long existed there. Mr. Gurfinkiel's mention of Voltaire, for example, reminds us that the 18th-century *philosophes* were an important source of hatred against the Jews. In his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, Voltaire called Jews "the most abominable people in the world" and "a totally ignorant nation" whose "priests have always sacrificed human victims with their sacred hands." During Hitler's domination of Europe, a history teacher named Henri Labroue had no difficulty compiling a 250-page book of Voltaire's anti-Jewish writings. A good part of this antipathy was later adopted by French socialists. No less a figure than Proudhon held that "one must send this race back to Asia or exterminate it."

During World War II, I was stationed as a soldier in Paris for almost a year and was repeatedly amazed that

French hatred of Germany did not result in sympathy with the Nazis' prime victims. Anti-Semitism, I concluded, was firmly embedded in French culture.

WILLIAM PETERSON
Monterey, California

MICHEL GURFINKIEL writes:

I am afraid I cannot agree with Svante Lundgren about Muslim public opinion in France. There is considerable evidence since September 11, in both print and electronic media, of the popularity enjoyed by Osama bin Laden among French Muslims, especially young people, who tend to see him either as a fundamentalist "freedom fighter" or as some kind of third-world Robin Hood. Admittedly, a different image may be inferred from the survey Mr. Lundgren cites. The question is, however, whether this survey—which was conducted in late September 2001 by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique (IFOP) on behalf of *Le Monde* (a daily newspaper), *Le Point* (a weekly newsmagazine), and Europe 1 (a major broadcasting station), and released on October 5—is to be trusted. I think it is not.

First, the survey is inconclusive on technical grounds. It was based on two samples, the first of 940 people deemed representative of the French population at large, and the second of a mere 548 people standing for the Muslim community. Both figures are below the minimum requirement for public-opinion samples in France, which ideally should be closer to 2,000 individuals. In its introduction to the survey, IFOP itself acknowledged that "there

are no statistics that would help in building up reliable samples of the French Muslim population."

But even technically impeccable poll results should not be taken at face value. When it comes to highly controversial issues, many people hide their true feelings, preferring to conform to whatever the mainstream, "politically correct" attitude of the moment seems to call for. A classic example in France concerns the disparity between the far Right's standing in public-opinion polls, which usually levels off at 10 percent (moral stigma being still very much attached to right-wing extremism), and the proportion of votes the far Right wins in elections, which for years has run closer to 15 or even 20 percent and has peaked at 25 or even 30 percent in some regions. This phenomenon has been so widely documented that French pollsters tend to employ a "public-correctness coefficient" of as much as 100 percent in tallying the incidence of pro-Le Pen sentiment.

In this one regard, French Muslims are very much of a kind with National Front sympathizers. They know that their views are largely unwelcome, and take care to disclaim them when questioned by pollsters. They can do so, moreover, with fewer inhibitions than non-Muslims, since the vast majority of them, being immigrants or the offspring of immigrants, remain embedded in an Arab/Islamic culture that to a large extent both condones and practices "dissimulation" (*taqia*) in public affairs. This is especially the case in surveys conducted on the basis of face-to-face interviews, as was the IFOP poll.

So it is little wonder that only 12 percent of the 500 or so Muslim respondents spoke positively of Osama bin Laden in late September 2001, less than three weeks after the terrorist attacks on America, whereas President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Lionel Jospin received positive ratings of 67 percent and 66 percent respectively. What seems far more significant, though, is that George W. Bush, the President of the country targeted and crippled on September 11, received an approval rating of only 21 percent from these same Muslims, being thus characterized by them as someone almost as hideous as bin Laden.

Finally, it is noteworthy that, as Mr. Lundgren himself reminds us, IFOP did not ask its Muslim informants whether or not they rejoiced at the September 11 attacks, but rather whether they agreed that "a Muslim should *not* rejoice because Islam condemns such acts" (emphasis added). Nor were they asked whether the perpetrators should or should not be called Muslims, but rather whether they agreed with the proposition that the attackers should not be called Muslims "because Islam is a religion of peace and moderation." In both cases, the questions were worded in such a way as to elicit a "proper" answer.

Franz Martin Oppenheimer insists that "the French Muslims responsible for the [anti-Jewish] attacks are the unassimilated and segregated ones." This is exactly what I wrote in my article, with the important proviso that, to the best of my knowledge, large numbers of French Muslims *are* unassimilated, and tend to segre-

gate themselves from the mainstream.

Mr. Oppenheimer disagrees with my statement that by 1933 Germany had become "the most murderously anti-Semitic nation in history." I would certainly not argue that all Germans had switched overnight from tolerance to genocidal hatred, and I do not dispute Mr. Oppenheimer's comments about Kristallnacht. My point was simply that even a relatively liberal nation like Germany could indeed, under certain conditions, turn within a matter of a few short years into a country capable of perpetrating the Holocaust. To my mind, this fact remains worth pondering.

Yaffa Ganz, for her part, suspects me of having minimized the present degree of French anti-Semitism. Noth-

ing could be further from the truth. What I did and do maintain is that the particular form of anti-Semitism we are now witnessing in France and in some other Western countries derives much of its strength from Muslim extremism—itsself a growing factor in French and West European society, with its own etiology and its own repercussions. We are, in short, in a new situation.

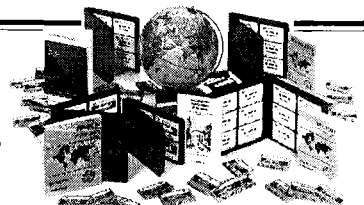
This is hardly to gainsay the truth of William Peterson's observations about the historical depth of anti-Jewish prejudice and hostility in France. Mr. Peterson is right to recall Voltaire and Proudhon, as well as their heirs among 20th-century progressives and socialists. Anti-Semitism was indeed rampant in many unlikely milieux during World

War II, including the Resistance.

On the other hand, neither French culture as a whole nor the French people as a nation has been so intoxicated by anti-Semitism as to turn it into a collective hallmark. Montesquieu and Rousseau were philo-Semites. So, in the 19th and 20th centuries, were most moderate left-wingers and most moderate conservatives. Many individual Frenchmen also came to the aid of Jews during the German occupation. My own father was arrested by the French police in 1941 and then sent to Auschwitz by the Germans; but my mother and my two elder brothers, along with other Jewish families, were able to hide for three years in a small village in western France, with the active help of the local peasants.

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Bush & Sharon

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Does the U.S. Finally Understand Israel?" [July-August], Michael B. Oren deftly describes how the State Department's view of Israel as an "obstacle to peace" in the Middle East has perversely affected both Arab expectations and the approach to the region taken by successive U.S. Presidents. Mr. Oren contends that American understanding of Israel's plight has improved, due in no small measure to abiding support for Israel in Congress, but he remains concerned about the sharp swings in U.S. Middle East policy since September 11. What are the chances, he asks, that "George W. Bush and his team will think afresh about the tortuous history of U.S. policy, and will embark on a new and less ambivalent course"?

Such a course, I would suggest, is already being pursued. Mr. Oren notes that the events of September 11 produced a new clarity in Washington concerning who America's friends and foes are, as well as a new respect for Israel's long-standing policy of military preemption. But he makes no mention of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's thunderbolt of a speech on October 4, 2001, which seems to have registered deeply with President Bush. Sharon declared that Israel would not tolerate being treated as Czechoslovakia was in 1938, and that it would defend itself by whatever means necessary. This was interpreted by many as

a slap at Bush, but a more accurate interpretation is that the prime minister wanted to alert the U.S. to the imminent danger of the State Department's appeasing tilt toward the terrorist perpetrators.

Sharon's speech, I believe, helped the President break free of the idea that the U.S. must preserve its Middle East "coalition" at all costs. Within the month, the State Department characterized Hamas, Hizbullah, and Islamic Jihad as global terrorist organizations. And notwithstanding Bush's apparent impatience with the Israeli incursion into Jenin following the Passover massacre in Netanya, he gave a stunningly affirmative answer to Oren's question—does the U.S. finally understand Israel?—in his much-anticipated speech of June 26. Though widely expected to revert to the State Department's preference for a Palestinian state without preconditions, he declared that American support depended on the election of a Palestinian leadership that would renounce terror. Bush brilliantly recognized the essence of Israel's situation: no peaceful coexistence is possible when one party maintains the aim of destroying the other.

MICHAEL BALCH
Iowa City, Iowa

MICHAEL B. OREN writes:

My article, written several weeks before President Bush's historic June 26 speech on the Middle East, questioned whether the Bush administration would

depart from longstanding U.S. policies toward Israel, and Michael Balch is right in pointing out that indeed the President has done so. He is also correct in noting the impact—overlooked by me—of Ariel Sharon's remarks of last October.

The West Bank

TO THE EDITOR:

It would be churlish to single out for praise only one of the exceptional articles in the July-August COMMENTARY, but to anyone who has an interest in the truth about the current situation in the Middle East, I would especially recommend Efraim Karsh's myth-shattering essay, "What Occupation?" Even though it may be too late to dispel the fiction of a Palestinian nationality springing full-blown from the propaganda mills of the PLO, it should not be too late to disabuse ourselves of the fiction of Israeli "oppression" and degrading "occupation."

Mr. Karsh only hints at the unprecedented benevolence with which Israel dealt with those we now call Palestinians—a benevolence that, unlike in the American occupation of Japan or the Allied occupation of Germany, allowed Israel's sworn enemy, the PLO, then headquartered abroad and unalterably committed to the total annihilation of the Jewish state, to infiltrate and infect the social fabric of the West Bank. Under this same benevolent Israeli

aegis, as Mr. Karsh documents, the per-capita income of the Palestinians increased tenfold; life expectancy by 50 percent; and the number of children attending schools by more than 100 percent, to say nothing of the construction and staffing of seven universities where, under the prior suzerainty of Jordan, none had existed before.

As these and other facts marshaled by Mr. Karsh remind us, it is not the Israeli occupation or the much ballyhooed "indignities" suffered as a result of normal checkpoint and other security measures that were the cause of the most recent wave of Arab terrorism; nor did economic deprivation lie at its heart. Rather, it was the unreconstructed determination of the PLO and its allies and friends to destroy the Jewish state, in whose legitimacy they have never acquiesced. What this means in turn is that no amount of economic aid or outside investment (much of which has been diverted anyway to the pockets of Arafat and his aides) will bring peace to the region. Only a complete halt to the hateful lies and virulent anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda that have been routinely taught in Palestinian schools and throughout the Muslim world and spread by a controlled press and subsidized mosques can bring us to the threshold of a process that, beginning with the unqualified acceptance of the Jewish state, can end by deserving the name of peace.

HENRY SHERMAN
New York City

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Jihad and the Professors

Daniel Pipes

LAST SPRING, the faculty of Harvard College selected a graduating senior named Zayed Yasin to deliver a speech at the university's commencement exercises in June. When the title of the speech—"My American Jihad"—was announced, it quite naturally aroused questions. Why, it was asked, should Harvard wish to promote the concept of jihad—or "holy war"—just months after thousands of Americans had lost their lives to a jihad carried out by nineteen suicide hijackers acting in the name of Islam? Yasin, a past president of the Harvard Islamic Society, had a ready answer. To connect jihad to warfare, he said, was to misunderstand it. Rather, "in the Muslim tradition, jihad represents a struggle to do the right thing." His own purpose, Yasin added, was to "reclaim the word for its true meaning, which is inner struggle."

In the speech itself, Yasin would elaborate on this point:

Jihad, in its truest and purest form, the form to which all Muslims aspire, is the determination to do right, to do justice even against your own

interests. It is an individual struggle for personal moral behavior. Especially today, it is a struggle that exists on many levels: self-purification and awareness, public service and social justice. On a global scale, it is a struggle involving people of all ages, colors, and creeds, for control of the Big Decisions: not only who controls what piece of land, but more importantly who gets medicine, who can eat.

Could this be right? To be sure, Yasin was not a scholar of Islam, and neither was the Harvard dean, Michael Shinagel, who enthusiastically endorsed his "thoughtful oration" and declared in his own name that jihad is a personal struggle "to promote justice and understanding in ourselves and in our society." But they both did accurately reflect the consensus of Islamic specialists at their institution. Thus, David Little, a Harvard professor of religion and international affairs, had stated after the attacks of September 11, 2001 that jihad "is not a license to kill," while to David Mitten, a professor of classical art and archaeology as well as faculty adviser to the Harvard Islamic Society, true jihad is "the constant struggle of Muslims to conquer their inner base instincts, to follow the path to God, and to do good in society." In a similar vein, history professor Roy Mottahedeh asserted that "a majority of learned Muslim thinkers, drawing on impeccable scholarship, insist that jihad must be understood as a struggle without arms."

Nor are Harvard's scholars exceptional in this

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regard. The truth is that anyone seeking guidance on the all-important Islamic concept of jihad would get almost identical instruction from members of the professoriate across the United States. As I discovered through an examination of media statements by such university-based specialists, they tend to portray the phenomenon of jihad in a remarkably similar fashion—only, the portrait happens to be false.

SEVERAL INTERLOCKING themes emerge from the more than two dozen experts I surveyed.* Only four of them admit that jihad has any military component whatsoever, and even they, with but a single exception, insist that this component is purely defensive in nature. Valerie Hoffman of the University of Illinois is unique in saying (as paraphrased by a journalist) that “no Muslim she knew would have endorsed such terrorism [as the attacks of September 11], as it goes against Islamic rules of engagement.” No other scholar would go so far as even this implicit hint that jihad includes an offensive component.

Thus, John Esposito of Georgetown, perhaps the most visible academic scholar of Islam, holds that “in the struggle to be a good Muslim, there may be times where one will be called upon to defend one’s faith and community. Then [jihad] can take on the meaning of armed struggle.” Another specialist holding this view is Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im of Emory, who explains that “War is forbidden by the *shari’a* [Islamic law] except in two cases: self-defense, and the propagation of the Islamic faith.” According to Blake Burleson of Baylor, what this means is that, in Islam, an act of aggression like September 11 “would not be considered a holy war.”

To another half-dozen scholars in my survey, jihad may likewise include militarily defensive engagements, but this meaning is itself secondary to lofty notions of moral self-improvement. Charles Kimball, chairman of the department of religion at Wake Forest, puts it succinctly: jihad “means struggling or striving on behalf of God. The great jihad for most is a struggle against oneself. The lesser jihad is the outward, defensive jihad.” Pronouncing similarly are such authorities as Mohammad Siddiqi of Western Illinois, John Iskander of Georgia State, Mark Woodard of Arizona State, Taha Jabir Al-Alwani of the graduate school of Islamic and social sciences in Leesburg, Virginia, and Barbara Stowasser of Georgetown.

But an even larger contingent—nine of those surveyed—deny that jihad has any military meaning whatsoever. For Joe Elder, a professor of soci-

ology at the University of Wisconsin, the idea that jihad means holy war is “a gross misinterpretation.” Rather, he says, jihad is a “religious struggle, which more closely reflects the inner, personal struggles of the religion.” For Dell DeChant, a professor of world religions at the University of South Florida, the word as “usually understood” means “a struggle to be true to the will of God and not holy war.”

Concurring views have been voiced by, among others, John Kelsay of John Carroll University, Zahid Bukhari of Georgetown, and James Johnson of Rutgers. Roxanne Euben of Wellesley College, the author of *The Road to Kandahar: A Genealogy of Jihad in Modern Islamist Political Thought*, asserts that “For many Muslims, jihad means to resist temptation and become a better person.” John Parcels, a professor of philosophy and religious studies at Georgia Southern University, defines jihad as a struggle “over the appetites and your own will.” For Ned Rinalducci, a professor of sociology at Armstrong Atlantic State University, the goals of jihad are: “Internally, to be a good Muslim. Externally, to create a just society.” And Farid Euseck, professor of Islamic studies at Auburn Seminary in New York City, memorably describes jihad as “resisting apartheid or working for women’s rights.”

Finally, there are those academics who focus on the concept of jihad in the sense of “self-purification” and then proceed to universalize it, applying it to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. Thus, to Bruce Lawrence, a prominent professor of Islamic studies at Duke, not only is jihad itself a highly elastic term (“being a better student, a better colleague, a better business partner. Above all, to control one’s anger”), but non-Muslims should also “cultivate . . . a civil virtue known as jihad”:

Jihad? Yes, jihad . . . a jihad that would be a genuine struggle against our own myopia and neglect as much as it is against outside others who condemn or hate us for what we do, not for what we are. . . . For us Americans, the greater jihad would mean that we must review U.S. domestic and foreign policies in a world that currently exhibits little signs of promoting justice for all.

Here we find ourselves returned to the sentiments expressed by the Harvard commencement speaker, who sought to convince his audience that jihad is something all Americans should admire.

* To see what the public is told, I looked at op-ed pieces, quotations in newspaper articles, and interviews on television rather than at articles in learned journals.

THE TROUBLE with this accumulated wisdom of the scholars is simple to state. It suggests that Osama bin Laden had no idea what he was saying when he declared jihad on the United States several years ago and then repeatedly murdered Americans in Somalia, at the U.S. embassies in East Africa, in the port of Aden, and then on September 11, 2001. It implies that organizations with the word “jihad” in their titles, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad and bin Laden’s own “International Islamic Front for the Jihad Against Jews and Crusade[rs],” are grossly misnamed. And what about all the Muslims waging violent and aggressive jihads, under that very name and at this very moment, in Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Chechnya, Kashmir, Mindanao, Ambon, and other places around the world? Have they not heard that jihad is a matter of controlling one’s anger?

But of course it is bin Laden, Islamic Jihad, and the jihadists worldwide who define the term, not a covey of academic apologists. More importantly, the way the jihadists understand the term is in keeping with its usage through fourteen centuries of Islamic history.

In premodern times, jihad meant mainly one thing among Sunni Muslims, then as now the Islamic majority.* It meant the legal, compulsory, communal effort to expand the territories ruled by Muslims (known in Arabic as *dar al-Islam*) at the expense of territories ruled by non-Muslims (*dar al-barb*). In this prevailing conception, the purpose of jihad is political, not religious. It aims not so much to spread the Islamic faith as to extend sovereign Muslim power (though the former has often followed the latter). The goal is boldly offensive, and its ultimate intent is nothing less than to achieve Muslim dominion over the entire world.

By winning territory and diminishing the size of areas ruled by non-Muslims, jihad accomplishes two goals: it manifests Islam’s claim to replace other faiths, and it brings about the benefit of a just world order. In the words of Majid Khadduri of Johns Hopkins University, writing in 1955 (before political correctness conquered the universities), jihad is “an instrument for both the universalization of [Islamic] religion and the establishment of an imperial world state.”

As for the conditions under which jihad might be undertaken—when, by whom, against whom, with what sort of declaration of war, ending how, with what division of spoils, and so on—these are matters that religious scholars worked out in excruciating detail over the centuries. But about the basic meaning of jihad—warfare against unbelievers to

extend Muslim domains—there was perfect consensus. For example, the most important collection of *hadith* (reports about the sayings and actions of Muhammad), called *Sahih al-Bukhari*, contains 199 references to jihad, and every one of them refers to it in the sense of armed warfare against non-Muslims. To quote the 1885 *Dictionary of Islam*, jihad is “an incumbent religious duty, established in the Qur’an and in the traditions [*hadith*] as a divine institution, and enjoined especially for the purpose of advancing Islam and of repelling evil from Muslims.”

JIHAD WAS no abstract obligation through the centuries, but a key aspect of Muslim life. According to one calculation, Muhammad himself engaged in 78 battles, of which just one (the Battle of the Ditch) was defensive. Within a century after the prophet’s death in 632, Muslim armies had reached as far as India in the east and Spain in the west. Though such a dramatic single expansion was never again to be repeated, important victories in subsequent centuries included the seventeen Indian campaigns of Mahmud of Ghazna (r. 998-1030), the battle of Manzikert opening Anatolia (1071), the conquest of Constantinople (1453), and the triumphs of Uthman dan Fodio in West Africa (1804-17). In brief, jihad was part of the warp and woof not only of premodern Muslim doctrine but of premodern Muslim life.

That said, jihad also had two variant meanings over the ages, one of them more radical than the standard meaning and one quite pacific. The first, mainly associated with the thinker Ibn Taymiya (1268-1328), holds that born Muslims who fail to live up to the requirements of their faith are themselves to be considered unbelievers, and so legitimate targets of jihad. This tended to come in handy when (as was often the case) one Muslim ruler made war against another; only by portraying the enemy as not properly Muslim could the war be dignified as a jihad.

The second variant, usually associated with Sufis, or Muslim mystics, was the doctrine customarily translated as “greater jihad” but perhaps more usefully termed “higher jihad.” This Sufi variant invokes allegorical modes of interpretation to turn jihad’s literal meaning of armed conflict upside-down, calling instead for a withdrawal from the world to struggle against one’s baser instincts in pursuit of numinous awareness and spiritual depth. But as Rudolph Peters notes in his authoritative

* The following analysis relies on Douglas Streusand, “What Does Jihad Mean?,” *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1997.

Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam (1995), this interpretation was “hardly touched upon” in pre-modern legal writings on jihad.

IN THE vast majority of premodern cases, then, jihad signified one thing only: armed action versus non-Muslims. In modern times, things have of course become somewhat more complicated, as Islam has undergone contradictory changes resulting from its contact with Western influences. Muslims having to cope with the West have tended to adopt one of three broad approaches: Islamist, reformist, or secularist. For the purposes of this discussion, we may put aside the secularists (such as Kemal Atatürk), for they reject jihad in its entirety, and instead focus on the Islamists and reformists. Both have fastened on the variant meanings of jihad to develop their own interpretations.

Islamists, besides adhering to the primary conception of jihad as armed warfare against infidels, have also adopted as their own Ibn Taymiya’s call to target impious Muslims. This approach acquired increased salience through the 20th century as Islamist thinkers like Hasan al-Banna (1906-49), Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), Abu al-A’la Mawdudi (1903-79), and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1903-89) promoted jihad against putatively Muslim rulers who failed to live up to or apply the laws of Islam. The revolutionaries who overthrew the shah of Iran in 1979 and the assassins who gunned down President Anwar Sadat of Egypt two years later overtly held to this doctrine. So does Osama bin Laden.

Reformists, by contrast, reinterpret Islam to make it compatible with Western ways. It is they—principally through the writings of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a 19th-century reformist leader in India—who have worked to transform the idea of jihad into a purely defensive undertaking compatible with the premises of international law. This approach, characterized in 1965 by the definitive *Encyclopedia of Islam* as “wholly apologetic,” owes far more to Western than to Islamic thinking. In our own day, it has devolved further into what Martin Kramer has dubbed “a kind of Oriental Quakerism,” and it, together with a revival of the Sufi notion of “greater jihad,” is what has emboldened some to deny that jihad has any martial component whatsoever, instead redefining the idea into a purely spiritual or social activity.

For most Muslims in the world today, these moves away from the old sense of jihad are rather remote. They neither see their own rulers as targets deserving of jihad nor are they ready to be-

come Quakers. Instead, the classic notion of jihad continues to resonate with vast numbers of them, as Alfred Morabia, a foremost French scholar of the topic, noted in 1993:

Offensive, bellicose jihad, the one codified by the specialists and theologians, has not ceased to awaken an echo in the Muslim consciousness, both individual and collective. . . . To be sure, contemporary apologists present a picture of this religious obligation that conforms well to the contemporary norms of human rights, . . . but the people are not convinced by this. . . . The overwhelming majority of Muslims remain under the spiritual sway of a law . . . whose key requirement is the demand, not to speak of the hope, to make the Word of God triumph everywhere in the world.

In brief, jihad in the raw remains a powerful force in the Muslim world, and this goes far to explain the immense appeal of a figure like Osama bin Laden in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Contrary to the graduating Harvard senior who assured his audience that “Jihad is not something that should make someone feel uncomfortable,” this concept has caused and continues to cause not merely discomfort but untold human suffering: in the words of the Swiss specialist Bat Ye’or, “war, dispossession, *dhimmitude* [subordination], slavery, and death.” As Bat Ye’or points out, Muslims “have the right as Muslims to say that jihad is just and spiritual” if they so wish; but by the same token, any truly honest accounting would have to give voice to the countless “infidels who were and are the victims of jihad” and who, no less than the victims of Nazism or Communism, have “their own opinion of the jihad that targets them.”

ISLAMISTS SEEKING to advance their agenda within Western, non-Muslim environments—for example, as lobbyists in Washington, D.C.—cannot frankly divulge their views and still remain players in the political game. So as not to arouse fears and so as not to isolate themselves, these individuals and organizations usually cloak their true outlook in moderate language, at least when addressing the non-Muslim public. When referring to jihad, they adopt the terminology of reformists, presenting warfare as decidedly secondary to the goal of inner struggle and social betterment. Thus, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the most aggressive and prominent Islamist group in the United States, insists that jihad

“does not mean ‘holy war’” but rather is a “broad Islamic concept that includes struggle against evil inclinations within oneself, struggle to improve the quality of life in society, struggle in the battlefield for self-defense (e.g., having a standing army for national defense), or fighting against tyranny or oppression.”

This sort of talk is pure disinformation, reminiscent of the language of Soviet front groups in decades past. A dramatic example of it was on offer at the trial of John Walker Lindh, the Marin County teenager who went off to wage jihad on behalf of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. At his sentencing in early October, Lindh told the court that, in common with “mainstream Muslims around the world,” he himself understood jihad as a variety of activities ranging “from striving to overcome one’s own personal faults, to speaking out for the truth in adverse circumstances, to military action in defense of justice.”

That a jihadist caught in the act of offensive armed warfare should unashamedly proffer so mealy-mouthed a definition of his actions may seem extraordinary. But it is perfectly in tune with the explaining-away of jihad promoted by academic specialists, as well as by Islamist organizations engaging in public relations. For usage of the term in its plain meaning, we have to turn to Islamists not so engaged. Such Islamists speak openly of jihad in its proper, martial sense. Here is Osama bin Laden: Allah “orders us to carry out the holy struggle, jihad, to raise the word of Allah above the words of the unbelievers.” And here is Mullah Muhammad Omar, the former head of the Taliban regime, exhorting Muslim youth: “Head for jihad and have your guns ready.”

IT is an intellectual scandal that, since September 11, 2001, scholars at American universities have repeatedly and all but unanimously issued public statements that avoid or whitewash the primary meaning of jihad in Islamic law and Muslim history. It is quite as if historians of medieval Europe were to deny that the word “crusade” ever had martial overtones, instead pointing to such terms as “crusade on hunger” or “crusade against drugs” to demonstrate that the term signifies an effort to improve society.

Among today’s academic specialists who have undertaken to sanitize this key Islamic concept, many are no doubt acting out of the impulses of political correctness and the multiculturalist urge to protect a non-Western civilization from criticism by making it appear just like our own. As for Islamists among

those academics, at least some have a different purpose: like CAIR and other, similar organizations, they are endeavoring to camouflage a threatening concept by rendering it in terms acceptable within university discourse. Non-Muslim colleagues who play along with this deception may be seen as having effectively assumed the role of *dhimmi*, the Islamic term for a Christian or Jew living under Muslim rule who is tolerated so long as he bends the knee and accepts Islam’s superiority.

As I can attest, one who dares to dissent and utter the truth on the matter of jihad falls under enormous censure—and not just in universities. In June of this year, in a debate with an Islamist on ABC’s *Nightline*, I stated: “The fact is, historically speaking—I speak as a historian—jihad has meant expanding the realm of Islam through armed warfare.” More recently, on a PBS *Lehrer NewsHour* program about alleged discrimination against Muslims in the United States, a clip was shown of a role-playing seminar, conducted by the Muslim Public Affairs Council, in which Muslim “activists” were practicing how to deal with “hostile” critics. As part of this exercise, my image was shown to the seminar as I spoke my sentence from the *Nightline* debate. The comment on this scene by the show’s PBS narrator ran as follows: “Muslim activists have been troubled by critics who have publicly condemned Islam as a violent and evil religion.” We have thus reached a point where merely to state a well-known fact about Islam earns one the status of a hostile bigot on a prestigious and publicly funded television show.

AMERICANS STRUGGLING to make sense of the war declared on them in the name of jihad, whether they are policymakers, journalists, or citizens, have every reason to be deeply confused as to who their enemy is and what his goals are. Even people who think they know that jihad means holy war are susceptible to the combined efforts of scholars and Islamists brandishing notions like “resisting apartheid or working for women’s rights.” The result is to becloud reality, obstructing the possibility of achieving a clear, honest understanding of what and whom we are fighting, and why.

It is for this reason that the nearly universal falsification of jihad on the part of American academic scholars is an issue of far-reaching consequence. It should be a matter of urgent concern not only to anyone connected with or directly affected by university life—other faculty members, administrators, alumni, state and federal representatives, parents of students, students themselves—but to us all.

Russia's Revolution

Leon Aron

The characters of nature are legible, it is true; but they are not plain enough to enable those who run to read them.

—Edmund Burke, *On Taste*

POST-COMMUNIST Russia's ten-year-old experiment in democracy, civil and political liberty, and a free market is not unlike the movement of a long, disorderly caravan on a vast and swampy plain—stopping, stumbling, occasionally all but drowning in muck, yet stubbornly creaking forward. Following closely behind this caravan, but never quite catching up, is a crowd of journalists and experts. Their heads are hung. They look neither backward to measure the road already traversed, nor to the sides to compare the caravan's progress with that of neighboring nomads, nor yet forward to where the road might lead. Instead, their eyes seem to be fixed forever on the dirt covering the wheels, the ruts in the road, and the swamp creatures feasting on the piles of refuse in the wagons' wake.

To the citizen of a mature liberal democracy, much in today's Russia must indeed appear flawed and ugly. There is a great deal to point to, from rampant corruption, to brutality in Chechnya, to the abuse of military conscripts, to attempts to curb

the independence of national television. And how could it be otherwise? Quite apart from the ignorance and venality that invariably attend enormous undertakings of any kind, post-Soviet Russia is a product of seven decades and four generations of a system in which mass murder, fear, and lies were routine. "History," said Alexander Yakovlev, speaking of Soviet Communism, "has never known such a concentrated hatred toward the human being."

The other half of the Soviet inheritance was an autarchic, obsolete, chronically retarded, coal-and-steel economy that, outside the military sectors, was decades behind the West, imported everything of quality, and relied on the sale of oil abroad and vodka at home for its two largest sources of revenue. According to a secret study commissioned by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989, the end of state subsidies would have resulted in the instant unemployment of 40 million people. Corruption and thievery were near-universal. Poverty was crushing—in 1988, 43 million people in the Soviet Union, or nearly one in six, lived in families with per-capita monthly income of no more than 75 rubles (\$7.50 at the underground exchange rate), a mere five rubles above the line officially separating those who did and did not have enough to eat. There was a housing crisis of mammoth proportions; hospitals and schools made do without running water or indoor toilets; the infant-mortality rate lagged behind Barbados and the United Arab Emirates. By the

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fall of 1991, the state was literally bankrupt and the country faced the specter of famine.

And today? The only sound, let alone fair, way of assessing a country's progress is by examining it in the context of that country's own history and in comparison with others similarly situated, not by the light of theoretical possibilities or the experiences of more distant and more fortunate lands. In the case of Russia, such an assessment is all the more urgent because of the suspicious attitude that has dominated the reaction both of many experts and of the U.S. media toward Russia's remarkable show of solidarity with the United States since September 11, 2001.

The near-unanimous explanation for Moscow's behavior has been that it is motivated by short-term, tactical considerations, and in expectation of a quid pro quo. If that is so, however, the payoff has yet to materialize. Last year, the United States went ahead and served notice of its intention to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. NATO's eastward expansion became a certainty. The Paris Club of sovereign lenders would not give an inch on Russia's debt-repayment schedule. No exceptions were made to facilitate Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization. And after a brief post-September 11 lull, the State Department resumed its castigation of Russian behavior in Chechnya.

If Russia's pro-American and pro-Western stance was designed to secure a return, it would seem to have been designed in error. But instead of reversing course, President Vladimir Putin proceeded to visit NATO headquarters—the first such visit by a Soviet or Russian leader—where he declared his country's "readiness to cooperate and interact" with the alliance and signaled a softening of Russian opposition to NATO enlargement. A few weeks later, his summit with President Bush in Crawford, Texas marked a first in the history of U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian relations: the two leaders disagreed on cardinal issues of arms control without damaging—in fact, while strengthening—overall relations between the two countries. Over the displeasure of the Europeans and the Democratic majority in the U.S. Senate, Russia accepted Washington's abrogation of ABM and proceeded to sign a treaty that cut its own nuclear arsenal by two-thirds, thus undoing the principle—the "balance of terror"—that had ruled relations between the two superpowers for decades.

The simple truth is that Russia's post-September 11 policies did not mark a sudden change of course prompted either by short-term tactical considera-

tions or by the whim of its leader. Rather, they were the logical culmination of a longer-term change. That change is nothing short of revolutionary. Save for the eight months between February and November 1917, never in the four-and-a-half centuries of the modern Russian state has Russia been freer, or more open to the outside, or less militaristic and less threatening to its neighbors and to the world than in the past decade.

How did Russia get to where it is? And will it last? This is a story that must be told in parts.

II

THE FIRST distinct component of Russia's revolutionary change is demilitarization. The extent of it may well be unprecedented in the annals of nations not defeated on the battlefield and occupied by the victors.

Following a huge cut in military procurement by the government of Boris Yeltsin and Yegor Gaidar in early 1992, the share of Russian GDP devoted to defense has gone down from at least 30 to under 5 percent.* Last year, Putin proudly noted that for the first time in its history, Russia was spending more on education than on defense. From being the backbone of the economy, the employer and supporter of between one-fourth and one-third of the populace, and an omnipotent and omnipresent overlord, the military-industrial complex has been reduced to a neglected and often humiliated beggar.

The nuclear arsenal inherited from the Soviet Union has been reduced from 10,000 deployable strategic warheads to 6,000, and, as I have already indicated, is on its way down to 2,000 or lower. The four-million-strong armed forces of Soviet days had been halved to 1.7 million by late 1996. Today's regular army of one million on active duty is slated to be reduced by another 350,000 men by 2003; the cuts are to include 240,000 officers and more than 380 generals. A plan drafted by two liberal parties, the Union of Rightist Forces and the Yabloko, and approved in the main by the president and the security council, envisions the abolition of the 300-year-old draft by 2010 and a transition to an all-volunteer force. No longer among the country's sacrosanct in-

* The 30-percent figure represents the high end of CIA estimates. According to a March 1998 speech by Yevgeny Primakov, formerly in the top echelons of Soviet intelligence, no less than 70 percent of Soviet GDP had been "spent on defense and defense-related projects." Compared with this systematic plunder of one of the world's richest nations by its unelected dictators, the incidence of post-Soviet "looting," about which U.S. columnists on both the Right and the Left used to work themselves into a lather, seems like small change.

stitutions and the unchallenged master of its resources, the Russian military may soon stop owning the country's young men as well.

Russia's demilitarization is the result of two interrelated choices, adumbrated in Gorbachev's "new political thinking" and implemented in the post-Communist era: the end of a messianic foreign policy and the abandonment of the USSR's domestic and Central-European empires. Purged from post-Soviet Russian behavior is not only the "struggle against imperialism" (meaning relentless opposition to the United States and subversion of Western-oriented regimes around the world), "solidarity with world anti-imperialist forces" (that is, the establishment of Soviet-style regimes in the third world), and "proletarian internationalism" (the support of such regimes to the bitter end), but also the *pre-Soviet* legacy of pan-Slavism, or Moscow as the Third Rome. The break with the last-named was exemplified by Russia's siding with the United States and its allies in Bosnia in 1992-1995; voting, in 1998, for economic sanctions against Yugoslavia and for a UN resolution demanding the withdrawal of Yugoslav troops from Kosovo; refusing to provide military or material assistance to Slavic and Orthodox Serbia; the firing by Yeltsin of Yevgeny Primakov, his staunchly anti-American and pro-Yugoslav prime minister; and joining in delivering the June 1999 ultimatum to Slobodan Milosevic that resulted in his giving up on Kosovo.

In 1992-95, Russia repatriated 800,000 troops, 400,000 civilian personnel, and 500,000 dependents from Eastern Europe. With the departure of the last Russian soldier from the Paldiski submarine training base in Estonia in September 1995, Russia returned, voluntarily, to its 17th-century borders. Of all the affected lands, Ukraine was the hardest and potentially the most dangerous to part with. One needs to recall the horrific bloodshed that accompanied the partition of the British Raj into India and Pakistan, or the demise of Yugoslavia, to appreciate the miraculously nonviolent birth of an independent Ukraine. In its own way, the 1997 treaty of friendship between Russia and Ukraine has been as central to the post-cold-war peace and stability of Europe as the French-German rapprochement engineered by Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer almost four decades earlier.

III

THE SECOND component in the transformation of Russia has been the wholesale transfer of national wealth from state ownership to private

hands. In 1991, an estimated 5 percent of GDP was produced in the nonstate sector; today, the figure is at least 70 percent. Over 900,000 private businesses have sprung up, with the actual number probably 30 to 40 percent higher if one takes into account unregistered enterprises. In the case of the largest firms, most of the new tycoons, or "oligarchs," owe their positions to inside maneuvering, bribes, or rigged auctions; but the overwhelming majority of small and medium-sized business have been created from scratch. In the past two years, Russia has introduced a flat 13-percent income tax (which Putin claims is the "lowest in Europe") and a 24-percent tax on corporate profits.

The state monopoly on the ownership of land, imposed by the Bolsheviks on their first day in power in 1917—and the last remaining bastion of socialism—crumbled after a 2001 bill opened 89 million acres of state-owned land in urban and industrial areas, followed by this summer's denationalization of 548 million acres of agricultural land (an area four times the size of France). Even foreigners can now lease land for up to 49 years (or buy it through Russian nationals), and will no doubt be permitted in time to buy it outright. Among the next targets of privatization are the state monopolies in gas, utilities, and railroads, plus the state pension fund.

In a much pooh-poohed statement, Putin has said that he wants to see the Russian standard of living catch up with Portugal's. But this, too, is a sign of epochal change: here was a Russian leader telling his people the truth about their condition, while making the improvement of that condition the goal of his government. Of course, the goal is still very far off: the poisonous residue left by the corruption and violence that attended privatization of some key state assets will impede for years, if not for decades, the emergence of what Russians call "civilized" capitalism.

The new prosperity is concentrated in the largest cities and especially in Moscow, which last year accounted for 30 percent of the country's retail sales. It is much less noticeable in smaller towns, and it has completely bypassed the utterly impoverished countryside, ruined by 50 years of collectivized rural serfdom, mired in alcoholism, and largely abandoned by younger people. As for those employed within the languishing state sectors of the economy, including teachers and doctors, they are in many instances poorer than they were in the Soviet days. Finally, in the transition from the meager but guaranteed "iron bowl" of Communism to the benefits and uncertainties of a free market, the young are far bet-

ter off than the old; pensioners have been especially hard hit by the cash shortages and inflation of the 1990's, which left them penniless and hungry.

To be sure, these tragedies have deep roots. In the Soviet Union of the late 1980's, hundreds of thousands of elderly women in rural communes, mostly World War II widows, survived on bread, salt, and potatoes grown on their tiny plots. Nor were such conditions confined to the countryside. After working as a physician for 50 years, my grandmother received a pension of 60 rubles a month that was nowhere near enough for her to pay the rent, buy clothes, and eat—and that was in the 1960's.

But the longevity of these problems hardly makes them less real, and Russia's failure so far to improve substantially the lot of its elderly citizens is an enduring blot on the transition. The same goes for the health-care crisis Russia inherited from the Soviet past. Until just a few years ago, life expectancy for the generation of men poisoned by the state-sponsored vodka binge of 1960-1985 continued to decline to the lower end of third-world levels. To make matters worse, an explosion of drug addiction, aggravated by a lack of disposable syringes and retrograde methods of blood transfusion, had resulted in a budding AIDS epidemic.

AND YET, despite all these obstacles, and thanks to the release of enormous entrepreneurial energy, the reorientation of the national economy has already produced startling results. Of these, the single most important as far as the United States is concerned must surely be the success of the privatized and deregulated oil industry. Unlike the state-owned gas monopoly Gazprom, which may go bankrupt and is likely to be broken up and sold, the "big six" private oil companies have reversed the Soviet record of decline; in the past two years, Russia's oil output has increased by 15 percent, and it is projected to grow by 11 percent this year.

Last February, for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia pumped more oil (7.28 million barrels a day) than Saudi Arabia, and it has since continued to outstrip the desert kingdom. Due to much higher production costs and much smaller established reserves, Russia is not likely ever to displace Saudi Arabia as the world's largest exporter. But if and when Russian oil starts to flow into this country, it will significantly reduce U.S. dependence on the Middle East and add a rather thick layer of armor to U.S. foreign policy.*

For ordinary Russians, one of the most visible benefits of privatization has been something as simple, and as essential to human dignity, as fresh

and delicious food available almost everywhere. Even before land was officially privatized, highly efficient "individual" farms, which had sprung up wherever regional governors or legislatures were too impatient to wait for Moscow, were already producing 40 percent of the total agricultural output on only 6 percent of the land. Ever since a wholly privatized wholesale commodity trade ensured market prices for farmers' produce, half of the crop no longer rots in the fields or in grain elevators. Last year, for the first time since the early 1960's, Russia not only managed to feed its people and livestock without the benefit of imports but exported over five million tons of grain.

In the late 1980's, Russians were spending, on average, 54 hours a month in queues. Outside Moscow, meat appeared in stores twice a year; at all other times one could purchase—once a month and only with a valid ration coupon—"meat products," which in the case of one large industrial city (Kirov) amounted to half a pound of "cooked sausage" and ten ounces of "smoked sausage." On a list of 221 essential food products, according to a leading Soviet economist, only 23 were regularly for sale in state stores. Today, food shortages, rationing of butter and meat, and multi-hour queues for milk and eggs are an increasingly dim memory. Gone, too, is the crassest of inequities: food distribution according to political loyalty and usefulness to the state. The delights formerly reserved for the *nomenklatura* are easily surpassed by the fare available from a regular supermarket.

Russian cities, especially larger ones, have been transformed: brightly lit streets, clean sidewalks, repaired and repainted buildings, new construction, inviting shop windows. Private enterprise has turned 850-year-old Moscow into a young, bright, booming metropolis, and one of Europe's best (and best hidden) gastronomic values.† The lives of Russian women, especially younger and college-educated ones, have changed beyond recognition. Women own 40 percent of the country's registered private businesses and have broken into occupations that were hitherto either inconceivable or nonexistent: newspaper columnist, party leader, banker, political analyst. When it comes to fashion, diet, physical fitness, recreation, the availability of contraception, average age of marriage and childbearing, or career opportunities, the transformation from only ten years ago is astounding.

* See R. James Woolsey, "Defeating the Oil Weapon," in the September COMMENTARY.

† For a sketch of the Russian gastronomic renaissance, see my "Restauration" in the May 2002 *Harper's*.

I HAVE not listed other indicators of a vastly improved standard of living. In 1990, there were eighteen cars per 100 households; in 2001 there were 42, and this year the number is likely to increase to 52. In 2001, over 2.5 million Muscovites owned cellular phones—in a city of 9 million. In the past two years, the number of Internet users has grown by 40 percent.

Thanks to the profusion of private institutions of higher learning, there were 75 percent more colleges and 50 percent more students in 2000 than in 1992. The number of private charities has grown from zero in 1988 to 70,000 in 2001. In 1991, of 290 million Soviet citizens, about a half million traveled; last year, out of a Russian population of 145 million, an estimated 5.25 million did. Eighty percent of the books published in Russia today are brought out by privately-owned houses; with both censorship and state monopoly having become things of the past, Russian bookstores evince no “policy” other than selling as many wares as possible. In Moscow’s largest bookstore, volumes of Solzhenitsyn and Pasternak, Nabokov and Sakharov, Hayek and Keynes stand next to biographies of Bill Gates and Monica Lewinsky.

Between a quarter and a third of the population makes up Russia’s steadily growing middle class. It consumes half of available goods and services, and it produces, overwhelmingly through the private sector, at least 30 percent of the country’s GDP. The emergence of this stratum—from zero—is one of the most momentous results of privatization. Its values, its attitudes, are among Russia’s best hopes, and a forceful demonstration of the truth that economic policy in Russia is only one manifestation of a fundamental re-orientation of larger national objectives. The jettisoning of militarism and empire has been accompanied by a jettisoning of state expansion and control over society. For the first time, the well-being of the individual, not the glory and might of the state, are Russia’s declared goals.

Interviewed by an American reporter on the eve of parliamentary elections in December 1999, one new entrepreneur, a thirty-eight-year-old regional distributor of medical supplies in the city of Voronezh, said:

I don’t know who will be leading Russia in a year’s time. But in this little piece of Russia, I know what we will do. We will improve services. We will hire new people, we will improve salaries. These are our plans, and most of them are realistic. We will do what we can in our own house.

IV

THE THIRD and final component of the Russian road to liberal democracy is de-Bolshevization, which amounts to less than democratization—and also considerably more. It falls short because it is not synonymous with creating free institutions and endowing them with the integrity, robustness, and independence characteristic of liberal-democratic states. But it also marks an unparalleled shift in political mentality, and is a necessary if not yet a sufficient condition of full democratization.

Again, the forest should not obscure the trees. Even in Moscow, Russia’s most liberal city, Bolshevism is alive and well, as evidenced in Mayor Luzhkov’s periodic round-ups of “dark-skinned Caucasians” or his appalling proposal to restore the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the brute who headed the Soviet secret police, to Lubyanka Square. The mummified corpse of Lenin still reposes in its tomb in Red Square, and will stay there until the 20-25 percent of the population that votes Communist is reduced at least by half—which might take another decade.

Bolshevism lives in the appalling brutality of the Chechen war. The “forbid!” and “scare!” instincts of the Soviet past periodically inform Vladimir Putin’s dealings with his critics in the mass media. Even as a remarkable religious revival continues apace, local authorities, egged on by the Orthodox church, harass newly founded Protestant denominations, and last September a fifth Roman Catholic priest, with a parish in Rostov-on-Don, was denied a re-entry visa. A young scholar, Igor Sutyagin, remains jailed without trial on what appear to be trumped-up charges of espionage.

Yet, just as undeniably, several defining Bolshevik features have been abandoned. Among them, very early on, was mercilessness. In the struggle between Communists and reformers, the losing Communists got away not only with their lives but with their political futures. Not one of the leaders of the 1991 Communist putsch, who surrounded Yeltsin’s headquarters with tanks, was ever brought to trial, and two of these leaders were subsequently elected to the Duma on the Communist ticket.

The same goes for the 638 members of the rump Congress of People’s Deputies who with armed force defied Yeltsin’s 1993 decree dissolving parliament. Never in the blood-soaked history of the Soviet or the Russian state had such treatment—a blanket amnesty—been accorded to the members or supporters of a defeated armed rebellion. (Had Yeltsin and his supporters lost, their own fate,

spelled out in the criminal code ratified by the rump Congress, would have been death.) Within a month, the opposition Communist newspapers, including *Pravda*, *Sovetskaya Rossia*, and the especially noxious and incendiary *Den* (Day), which changed its name to *Zavtra* (Tomorrow), were back on sale, as militant as ever.

IN POST-SOVIET Russia, the guarantor of liberty and private property is the 1993 constitution, at the time a much-criticized document. But for nine years, including a period of severe financial crisis and currency devaluation in 1998, not to mention the “cold civil war” of 1995-99, when a pro-reform Kremlin and a Communist-dominated parliament were locked in battle, it has proved a surprisingly resilient framework. Its list of “foundations of a constitutional system” begins by declaring “man, his rights and liberties” as the highest value, which it is the duty of the state to recognize and protect. Among other such “foundations” are private property, ideological diversity, and a multi-party system. The state may establish no official ideology or religion. Separate articles guarantee freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press. Censorship is prohibited. Not one of the enumerated liberties has been implemented fully or consistently; but all are alive, observed in the main, evolving, and becoming habitual.

Modeled on Charles de Gaulle’s 1958 constitution for the Fifth Republic, the Russian constitution was produced under similar pressures and was similarly designed to cope with an electorate deeply and passionately divided between Left and Right, and with a raucous and chaotic parliament in which no party was in the majority. In the words of the great French political analyst Raymond Aron, “When the nation is so profoundly divided, you get no common will. With the constitution of the Fifth Republic, perhaps, there will not be a common will, but there will be a will.” This objective was achieved in Russia as it was in France by explicitly skewing the balance of power away from the parliament and toward the executive, elected by all the people. Aron called the result an “elective monarchy” and an “authoritarian republic”; in its Russian version, it is even farther away from a liberal parliamentary democracy—but still, for Russia, an enormous advance.

To its credit, the Russian constitution departs from its French counterpart by withholding from the president some rather powerful tools. Thus, the federal assembly of Russia can override a pres-

idential veto, and it is much harder for the Russian president to dissolve parliament. Indeed, the Duma, far from being impotent as it is often portrayed, has at its disposal some strong levers of influence—which, for better and for worse, it has not hesitated to use over the last years, including by blocking the privatization of land and state-owned monopolies.

ALONG WITH the renunciation of violence and cruelty in politics; freedom of speech, press, and protest; and freedom of electoral choice and opposition, a central element of de-Bolshevization has been the overhaul of the legal system. Russia’s heritage in this area was all but hopeless: 70 years of utterly politicized justice whose hallmarks were fear, secrecy, arbitrariness, and corruption; courts without resources and without power; poorly educated judges who earned less than truck drivers; all-powerful state prosecutors; and an acquittal rate of under 1 percent.

In terse, commanding sentences, the 1993 constitution laid the foundation for a Russian state of laws, and the following years have witnessed a harrowingly slow but inexorable inching toward implementation. For (once again) the first time in Russian history, ordinary citizens began to sue authorities—and win. Between 1993 and 1998 the number of such suits grew by tenfold, with the courts ruling for the plaintiffs in more than three out of four cases. The federal government and even the president were no longer immune from challenge. In what might be called Russia’s first class-action lawsuit, over 200,000 pensioners successfully litigated to force the government to recalculate benefits in their favor.

The jurisdiction of district and regional courts was widened dramatically in 1995 when they were empowered to rule on actions by both local and federal authorities. In one typical instance, the courts all but invalidated the reactionary Freedom of Conscience Law, passed in 1997 over Yeltsin’s veto and allowing local authorities to deny registration permits (and thus legality) to religious organizations—mostly Catholics and aggressively proselytizing Protestant denominations—that allegedly “incite hatred” or perpetrate “intolerant behavior.” Among the communities that owe to the courts their ability to function openly in Russia are Jehovah’s Witnesses in Orel, Pentecostals in Magadan, and the Church of Scientology in Moscow.

The single most effective tool of the post-Soviet legal revolution has been the constitutional court—aimed unprecedentedly at making a Russian gov-

ernment obey its own laws. Weeding out the remnants of Soviet totalitarianism, the court has struck down some key aspects of the local residence permits (the infamous *propiska*) that were long a requirement for obtaining a passport for foreign travel; banned the imposition of the death penalty until citizens of all regions have secured their right to a jury trial; and reinforced the rights of owners of urban real estate.

Most recently, after years of stalling in the Duma, the first post-Soviet code of criminal procedure has also been approved and signed by the president. By January 2003, only juries will hear cases of "grave" crime (murder, rape, or terrorism); in the absence of court review, individuals arrested by the police will have to be released unconditionally after 48 hours; judges will be able to rule out evidence obtained in violation of law; there will be provisions for plea-bargaining and bail; and the power to authorize arrests, searches, and seizures will shift from state prosecutors to judges. As a leading Russian daily put it, with the adoption of this new code "we are finally ridding ourselves of the atavistic Soviet judicial machine."

V

NO SURVEY of the Russian situation can omit a look at the condition of Russian Jewry, both for its intrinsic interest and for what it signifies about the general health of society. For, like everywhere else in the world, only more so, the treatment of Jews tells volumes about the state of the Russian nation.

After two centuries of state-sponsored and state-enforced anti-Semitism, one should hardly be surprised to find post-Soviet Russia marred by its own quotient of anti-Jewish incidents. From hand-painted anti-Semitic posters to vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, burning of synagogues, and occasional harassment of religious and community leaders, the story does not differ markedly from that in Eastern Europe as a whole (or, of late, from the norm in certain countries of Western Europe as well). Even more disturbingly, the ultranationalist Russian National Unity party (RNE in the Russian acronym) has begun to spread its influence beyond the traditionally anti-Semitic regions of southern Russia, holding marches, mailing death threats to individual Jews, desecrating graves, and organizing public celebrations of Hitler's birthday.

But the main anti-Semitic force in Russia today resides not in the marginalized RNE but (again like almost everywhere else) on the Left—and specifi-

cally in the Communist party, still the country's largest political organization. Anti-Semitism was key to the electoral strategy of the party's chairman, Gennady Zyuganov, in his 1996 presidential bid against Boris Yeltsin. (In his writings, Zyuganov named "transnational cosmopolitan forces," "international financial oligarchy," and the "Judaic Diaspora" as spearheads of a worldwide anti-Russian conspiracy, and his campaign's anti-Yeltsin cartoons were suffused with anti-Semitic images.) At an October 1998 meeting of Communists and "popular patriots," the Communist parliamentarian General Albert Makashov, who had commanded the Duma's "defenders" in the 1993 confrontation with Yeltsin, looked directly into a television camera and intoned: "All kikes—into the grave!" Yeltsin demanded an investigation, but the party refused to condemn Makashov.

And yet here too one must retain perspective. In keeping with the new constitution, Russian domestic passports no longer contain the infamous "fifth point" ("nationality"), which in Soviet days was a primary tool of anti-Jewish discrimination in employment and education; all quotas on Jewish students in colleges and universities have been eliminated. And as for high government offices, *judenrein* since Khrushchev's day, in the 1990's these became conspicuously populated by Jews and half-Jews, especially among the main reformers. Jewishness did not impede the rise either of Grigory Yavlinsky, the leader of the (now-declining) liberal party Yabloko, or of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the populist proto-fascist.

Russian Jews, who make up between 1 and 2 percent of the population, were among the first to profit from the arrival of economic liberty in their country. Among the no more than twelve Russian "oligarchs"—the owners or majority stockholders of the largest industrial and financial groups—five are Jews, and the top managerial level of the Russian oil industry is heavily Jewish as well. Despite the fears of many in the late 1980's and early 90's, and despite isolated anti-Semitic incidents, no popular backlash has materialized to threaten their position—or the position of Russian Jewry in general. Not only do all public-opinion polls show that ordinary Russians have accepted the visibility of Jews in the economy and in politics, but a pioneering study of Moscow Jewish youth organizations reveals that most young Jewish activists do not consider anti-Semitism to be a problem in their lives.

Between 1990 and 2002, the Russian Jewish community opened 75 kindergartens and 64 elementary schools. In Moscow today, there are seven

Jewish day schools, three Jewish institutions of higher learning, and two rabbinical schools. Since January 2001, the Federation of Jewish Communities has been certifying Russian-made kosher foods, and three tons of kosher meat are shipped weekly to cities across Russia from a central slaughterhouse in Moscow. The city's first Jewish camp opened in the summer of 1993 and took in 600 children. In the same year, the city government gave a building to a Lubavitch-run private school enrolling 200 boys and girls. When Natan Sharansky first returned to Moscow in 1997 as Israel's minister of industry and trade—two decades after his arrest and eleven years after his expulsion from the Soviet Union—he experienced his “most dramatic sense of change” at a meeting with teachers in Jewish schools. “There were people from a thousand different schools,” an astounded Sharansky told a reporter. “To think that, twenty years ago, the big thing was an underground class of 40 students!”

Nor should it be forgotten that over one million native Russian-speakers live today in Israel. Every evening, tens of millions of television viewers all over the country hear paratroopers, tank commanders, rescue workers, and relatives of murdered civilians speaking in unaccented Russian about the reality of their lives in the Jewish state. Not only does this help to keep coverage of the Israel-Palestinian conflict refreshingly free of pro-Arab cant, but the sheer size of the immigration to Israel has forged close connections with that nation in the most unlikely places. In October 2001, an errant Ukrainian missile shot down a Siberian Airlines plane carrying recent Jewish immigrants to Israel who were flying home to celebrate Sukkot with their relatives and friends in Novosibirsk, as well as Jewish and non-Jewish tourists returning from a visit to Israel. As subsequent reports revealed, the Novosibirsk Jewish community runs a school, a synagogue, and a community center, among other institutions. On the day of the accident, the mayor of this city of 1.5 million, among whom there are no more than 15,000 Jews, came to the airport to comfort the grieving relatives.

IN RUSSIA, both people and officialdom take their cue from the head of state; in their relations to the Jewish “question,” both Russian presidents have set impressive public examples. In January 1996, at the start of his campaign against Zyuganov, who was supported by the anti-Semitic “popular patriotic forces,” Boris Yeltsin made a point of sending a personal representative to a

meeting of the Russian Jewish Congress. And in the depth of the 1998 financial crisis, as leftist demonstrators burned photographs of the president with a Star of David painted on his face, Yeltsin spoke at the opening of a synagogue and Holocaust memorial in Moscow. In that “temple of remembrance,” as he called it, he declared ringingly that it was “terrible to see the appearance of homegrown [Russian] fascists, racial and ethnic intolerance. . . . It is inadmissible.”

As for Putin, in September 2000 he attended the dedication of a new Moscow synagogue and community center where he spoke about the need for ethnic and religious tolerance, and afterward he lunched in the Kremlin with Natan Sharansky. Three months later, in the presence of former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Putin lit a Hanukkah candle and received a standing ovation at Moscow's Lubavitch synagogue; accepting the menorah as a gift, he told the participants that “the light and warmth it radiates will illuminate the Kremlin.” In January 2001, the first kosher dinner ever prepared in the kitchen of the Kremlin was given by Putin for the visiting president of Israel, Moshe Katsav.

This past July, Putin awarded the Order of Courage to twenty-eight-year-old Tatyana Sapunova, a young Christian woman who was injured while trying to tear down a booby-trapped poster alongside a Moscow highway. The poster proclaimed “Death to Kikes.” “If we allow the bacillus of chauvinism to develop,” Putin said on this occasion, “we will destroy the country. . . . Thank God that here in Russia there are people who understand the true nature of the problem and are willing to fight.” “You are right,” the young woman answered softly. “There are many more people who would have done what I did.”

VI

IS RUSSIA safely on its way, then, to becoming a “normal country”? It is too soon to pronounce on this question with absolute confidence. After all, in the words of the scholar Egor Yakovenko, the end of the Soviet Union and the end of Russia's Middle Ages occurred on the same day—August 21, 1991, when Boris Yeltsin took power and began to oversee the emergence of a secular, nonideological, empire-free Russian state. That was little more than a short decade ago. But what one *can* assert with assurance is that, since that day, all the crucial choices have been made by the Russian people themselves, peacefully and freely. And that is a

sign, if not yet of normalcy, then of normalization.

Since the August 1991 revolution, Russia has held two national referendums; five successive elections to the Duma and the presidency; and at least three rounds of gubernatorial and legislative elections in each of the country's 89 regions. In only one national ballot has the turnout fallen below 61 percent of eligible voters. In the two presidential elections, 69 percent of eligible voters came to the polls. The spectacle of 60 million people trudging in the dark and cold of the Russian winter to polling stations stretched over eleven time zones must be among the most moving sights any student of fledgling democracies is likely to encounter.

Most fatefully, in an April 1993 referendum the people continued to repose their confidence in Yeltsin and to support economic reform. In the 1996 presidential election, they preferred Yeltsin to the Communist party's Gennady Zyuganov. And in December 1999, they shifted the plurality in the Duma from the Communists and their allies to the pro-reform Center-Right.

What has been occurring in Russia constitutes, most obviously, a dramatic break with Soviet totalitarianism in all its guises. But it also constitutes a no less dramatic break with the centuries-old political culture of Russia itself: blood-drenched, zero-sum, winner-take-all. Over a century ago, before the Bolsheviks appeared on the scene, Anton Chekhov wrote of Russia's "heavy, chilling history, barbarism, bureaucracy, poverty, and ignorance. . . . Russian life smashes the Russian like . . . a thou-

sand-ton rock." And Chekhov did not shrink from naming what needed to be done: to "squeeze out the slave, drop by drop," from the Russian soul.

This squeezing-out has been perhaps the most stunning result of the past decade and a half. In the words of Grigoriy Chkhartishvili, Russia's most popular writer, "We have squeezed out a lot. In the past fifteen years, people living in this country have straightened their backs." The "most precious product of this evolution," Chkhartishvili continued, has been human dignity, a quality in "catastrophically short supply" throughout Russian history but seemingly inbred in the post-Soviet generation.

The voice of that generation, the first in Russian history to grow up neither under a dictatorship nor under a monarchy, nor to be brutalized by a civil war, was first heard in the 1996 presidential election when, according to exit polls, Yeltsin led Zyuganov by 71 to 23 percent among eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-olds. When asked to choose the basic elements of a decent society, three-quarters of those planning to vote for Yeltsin named equality of opportunity; only 22 percent named equality of income or of standard of living.

Given the distance Russia must yet travel, one may say today that it shows no more than the promise of true liberal democracy, a promise that may take decades to be realized. But considering the distance already traveled in so amazingly brief a time, that promise is fully credible, and worthy of the acclaim and the support of lovers of liberty everywhere.

Judaism Beyond Words: Part 3

David Gelernter

Introduction

MOST AMERICAN Jews, I would bet, know more about Christianity than about Judaism. (Not that they are big experts on Christianity.) And yet explaining Judaism is a booming industry in this country. Guidebooks keep appearing, the lecture-series and adult-education markets seem to thrive, audio tapes and CD's and videos and websites keep popping up like dandelions in spring. Many are first-rate. Several of the guidebooks will be classics. A few already are.

Nonetheless, Judaism has not been explained. There are many guided tours on the market, but few syntheses. I have been attempting a synthesis in a series of essays in COMMENTARY, the first two installments of which have already appeared.

I believe that the essential themes of Judaism are images—images that capture deep religious and philosophical ideas. But these are mental images: to be thought, not to be painted or diagrammed. The first two that I have attempted to describe are cosmic separation—the essence of holiness—and the “veil” (a kind of bridal veil) that separates, necessarily and forever, man's realm and God's. The third

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image is the hardest of all to put in words: it is an image of spiraling inward, of man traveling into himself.

In some ways, the images seem inconsistent: the veil has to do with God's transcendence, His above-and-beyondness. The in-traveling spiral has to do with God's immanence, His existence inside the human mind. But it makes no sense to say that these ideas are *logically* inconsistent, any more than it would to say that two separate lines in a musical counterpoint are inconsistent. (If there's a C here, how can there be an E-flat up there? Make up your mind!) Each line has its own independent integrity. To hear Judaism truly is to hear its themes simultaneously.

This approach might be called “Picture Judaism.” Each mental “theme-picture” is based on Torah; each has been refined and modified by thousands of years of Jewish thought. (An image, unlike a text, can absorb a thousand nuanced glazes and refinements and still maintain its compactness.) You could teach such images to a kindergarten class, or discuss them in a graduate seminar. Each one is vividly clear to the mind of a practicing Jew.

But each is hard to put in words—when you try to bring one to the surface, you find it as delicate as an ancient manuscript that disintegrates in air.

When you try to describe one, the original is so electric with meaning that any description pales by comparison. But the effort should be made—not only because these pictures *are* Judaism but because they are among the culminating achievements of Western religious thought.

There are special difficulties when a theme-picture centers, as the inward-spiral does, on Jewish beliefs about God. Judaism is widely held to be a religion of action and not belief, of performance rather than doctrine or dogma. Furthermore, Jews have long been leading doubters of the religious system they created. They are associated in the modern mind with heterodoxy, skepticism, or atheism, not with faith.

It is true that, in Judaism, action takes precedence over belief. Jews will come to know God (the rabbis assume) as a consequence of leading a Jewish life; and they will lead a Jewish life because they are Jews, not because of any prior religious convictions. In the classical formulation, spoken by the people Israel at Mount Sinai, *nishma* (“we will hear,” or have faith) follows *na’aseh* (“we will act”). The prophet Micah spells out the Lord’s requirements: “Only to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with your God” (6:8). To do justice, you act. If you love mercy, you act. And what does

“walk humbly” mean? Judaism’s term for religious law is *halakha*: literally, “way of walking.” *Halakha* tells you how to fulfill Micah’s instruction.

Judaism is a religion of action. But it is also a religion of faith. Twice every day, Jews repeat the “fundamental theorem” of Judaism, which is a statement of belief, not a formula for action. “Listen, Israel: the Lord is our God; the Lord is one.”

The Jewish passion for doubting God must be understood for what it is, the expression of an on-going obsession with God. A contrasting parable: anyone who studied the history of Britain in the 19th century but not the 20th would assume that, by the end of the 20th, there would be no more established church in Britain. The established church was already controversial in the 19th century; it came to be opposed by many non-Anglicans and by many super-Anglicans; and the 20th century was in general far more hostile to religion even than the 19th. Of course, there still is an established church in Britain—but not because it has become any more acceptable; because virtually no one cares any more. In Europe, religion is a dead letter.

Jews continue to care. They continue to be obsessed. Pro or anti, they keep bringing up the topic of God because they keep thinking about it; they can’t shake it out of their hair. Chances are they never will.

Look Inside

ABRAHAM is the founder of Judaism, and his story rests on two identical, untranslatable divine commands, direct from God. This repeated command is *lekh l’kha*, meaning “move yourself,” “go you,” “pick yourself up.” It first occurs when God tells Abraham, “Move yourself from your land, from your birthplace, from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). It appears again at the beginning of the Akedah: the celebrated story of the binding of Isaac. God “tests” Abraham by telling him, take your son Isaac and *move yourself* to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:2).

It is a basic axiom of all rabbinic commentary that the Torah wastes no words. Every word tells. In the phrase “move yourself,” what does “yourself” (*l’kha*) tell? Why not just plain “move!”? Commenting on the first appearance of this phrase, the Zohar (the medieval foundational text of kabbalah) offers an

opinion: “yourself” is a clue that God actually intends an inner journey; He actually tells Abraham, “Move *into* yourself.” Once again (it happens often), rabbinic interpretation has used an ancient rule of reading (which most modern readers reject) to expose a vital rushing undercurrent of meaning (which most modern readers never see). Our job is to understand what the Zohar has just told us.

At the climax of the Akedah, an angel calls to Abraham “from the heavens” and orders him not to sacrifice his son. A literal “voice from heaven” intervenes at the crucial moment. But the Talmud takes an interesting approach to the whole question of heavenly voices. It tells us to ignore them. “We pay no attention to a *bat kol*” (“daughter of a voice”)—meaning a voice that seems to speak God’s words but is not accompanied by the overwhelming, unmistakable experience of direct revelation that happened at Sinai.

In fact, the Talmud goes further. Rabbi Yehoshua invokes a passage in Deuteronomy—"it is not in the heavens"—to mean that the Torah itself is no longer on high but is right here on earth, and *man* is responsible for interpreting it. Don't go craning your necks, scanning the skies, or watching the cosmic newswire for meaningful portents; do not seek, expect, or even pay attention to divine or seemingly divine pronouncements from nature or beyond nature. Truth is not in the heavens. It is right *here*.

But exactly *where*? And how do you find it?

MANY GENERATIONS after the great communal revelation of the Ten Commandments, the prophet Elijah returns to the mountain of Horeb—another name for Sinai. He is told to "stand on the mountain before the Lord"; he watches and waits. A great wind comes up, but "the Lord was not in the wind." Then an earthquake, but "the Lord was not in the earthquake." Then a fire, but "the Lord was not in the fire." And after the fire, "a still, small voice."

A still, small voice must be something very different from one of those heavenly voices the Talmud wants us to ignore. But what is it? And where does it come from?

And still another question, from a different world of experience: what does it mean that the main façade of nearly all synagogues is not on the outside but on the inside? Even in such medieval synagogues as the Altneuschul in Prague or the reconstructed synagogue of Worms, where the ark is plain and small, it is nonetheless the building's main façade. It is framed with emphatic dignity. It offers a door or entrance-way at the top of its own flight of steps. As the centuries passed, the stairs and frame grew larger and fancier. Often the ark had several doors side by side, just like the ceremonial entrance to a public building. Even in synagogues where the ark was freestanding, it took on the character of a grand entrance.

To find the Torah, which is God's word, we open the ark; we enter the building's interior façade. But this grand entryway doesn't connect outer to inner; it connects inner to innermost.

Once Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Once, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Temple Mount. After the destruction of the Temple, the physical journey to Jerusalem was replaced by a spiritual journey, and the architecture of the synagogue offers a commentary on what that journey entails. You are already inside, but when you throw open the doors of the ark and prepare to go further in, you are about to enter . . . what?

Thus the third theme-picture of Judaism: the paradoxical "move!" without motion, the voyage to the headwaters of the still, small voice (which could only be an inner voice), the grand entryway you cannot (physically) enter, the journey into yourself to find not yourself but your God.

BACK TO the Akedah, which ranks among the small handful of mankind's most intensely studied stories. We know the story, and tend to take the details for granted. But if we listen as if for the first time, we can hear its strangeness.

At God's command, Abraham and Isaac walk three days and arrive at Moriah at last. But why does Abraham have to "move himself" at all? What purpose does the three-day journey serve? If God had fixed the sacrifice of Isaac for right now, on the spot, He could have found out just as surely whether Abraham had it in him to offer up his beloved son.

And found it out in a vastly less cruel way. For if "sacrifice your son" is immeasurably cruel, "sacrifice your son three days from now," after three days of hideous anticipation, is immeasurably more cruel. Unless this detail shocks us down to our feet, we are not reading the story at all. Plain common sense—never mind philosophy or theology—forces us to believe that Abraham's three-day journey must somehow change the nature of the test itself.

It does—if we understand "move yourself" as the Zohar understands it. The Zohar's reading of *lekh l'kha* offers a radical re-understanding of the test. It suggests that the test was not an *act*, "offer up your son"; such an act requires one moment's willpower and it is done forever. The test was whether Abraham could sustain a *belief* over three long days. Not "will you sacrifice your son?" Rather, "will you have faith in Me and believe that I will not *let* you sacrifice your son?" Will Abraham really believe this? Will he go on believing it, hour by hour, mile by mile, step by step?

This is not the traditional way of reading the biblical story, but every word of the story is consistent with both the traditional and this untraditional reading. To know for sure which is right, we would have to know Abraham's mind—is he thinking, "I am going to sacrifice my son" or "I am *not* going to"? But as the literary philosopher Erich Auerbach noted in a famous essay in *Mimesis*, the Bible deliberately gives us no shred of a direct report on Abraham's state of mind.

So we are left with this. In one of literature's most celebrated exchanges, Isaac says to his father: "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the

lamb for the burnt-offering?" Abraham answers: "God will provide Himself with the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son" (Genesis 22:7-8). When Abraham "uttered those words," Shalom Spiegel writes in his magisterial and definitive study of the Akedah literature, "his only purpose at the time was to put Isaac off." That is the universal consensus. But there is a simpler interpretation: Abraham was telling Isaac the truth, exactly as he saw it.

He had just spent three days traveling into himself, testing his belief. Was it solid enough to walk on? Would it bear his weight and his son's? And he had emerged on the far side, knowing the reality of his faith—faith not in the sense of blind obedience; faith meaning faith in God's goodness. The three days' walk to Moriah was a three days' spiral into himself.

JUDAISM TELLS us that the Torah "is not in the heavens." It tells us that God is not in Jerusalem, not in the Temple, and not in the Holy of Holies; not in nature, and not in history. God is inside.

Most members of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition conceive God to be vaguely upward or outward or heavenward, lying in the general direction in which steeples point—an unfathomably powerful force acting somehow on mankind and the universe from outside. But if synagogues had steeples, they would be inverse, anti-steeples pointing not down but inward. (Some synagogues have towers, but they work aesthetically insofar as they suggest the wooden standards of Torah scrolls, not upward-pointing arrows.)

In Judaism's radical view of divinity, God is a still, small voice, and He acts on mankind and the universe not from outside but only from deep within, through the medium of each human mind. If the human will is a breakwater with waves beating on it from the world outside, God is not part of those waves; God is on the other side, on the inner side of the human will. If you looked in from the sea toward all those breakwaters, toward human history, you would see God's presence not at all.

But Jews are said to worship the "God of history." The Jew's God is said to be a force working in history, or to manifest Himself in history. The implication is that God broods over history like a chess player and that, though His reasoning might be inscrutable, His will is somehow expressed in the moves He makes.

This view is wrong. If God (as a certain Jewish physicist once said) does not play dice with the universe, He does not play chess with it, either.

In Maimonides' thirteen principles of faith, there is no claim that the Jews' God is the God of history; no assertion that God directs history or manifests Himself in history. (The thirteen principles are part of the prayerbook, enumerated verbatim in the daily morning service and recast as poetry in a hymn called *Yigdal*.) Jewish literature, taken as a whole, says just the opposite. And with good reason: the idea is absurd. Could the world's most savagely tormented people possibly believe that God—"gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and full of lovingkindness" (Joel 2:13, quoting Exodus 34:6)—is "manifest" in their history? They could not and do not.

God's withdrawal from Israel's history is a theological and historical fact. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. It was rebuilt, but the Ark of the Covenant was gone forever. At the start of the Second Temple, prophecy ended. The Talmud says: "When the last prophets—Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi—died, the holy spirit ceased from Israel." The Second Temple was less holy than the first; it had no ark (or ark cover or cherubim), and (according to the rabbis) no *shekhinah*—God's presence was gone.

Still, the Second Temple was dazzling, especially after Herod rebuilt it in the first century B.C.E. Although the prophets and the rabbis after them taught that holiness and good deeds are more important than animal sacrifices, they were impressed with the Temple despite themselves. Life (the rabbis taught) was lived at a lower spiritual level than it had once been; yet the Temple was a formidable institution. "He who did not see Herod's temple," the Talmud reports, "missed seeing the most beautiful building in the world." Some talmudic authorities even suggested that the divine presence had been part of the Second Temple after all.

When the high priest pronounced God's holy name in the Temple, the Talmud says, his voice used to be audible all the way to the distant city of Jericho. After the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E., and the people were exiled and scattered, the silence was awful. What then? Another crucial talmudic statement: "From the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One Blessed be He has nothing in His universe but the four *amot* of halakha alone." Four *amot*—the word (singular: *amah*) is usually translated "cubits"—is the space occupied by one human being. Halakha is the Jewish religious law, the embodiment of Judaism. In other words: God has nothing in His universe but the mind of the Jew. He has no power to intervene in history; no power to move human beings

like chess pieces. He has the four *amot* of halakha, period.

HAS GOD abandoned the Jews then? No—God follows them into exile. He suffers along with them, which is only natural; He has become literally part of them. A midrash reads: “Have I not already caused to be written [Proverbs 17:17], ‘A brother is born for troubled times?’ I am Israel’s brother in their troubled hour.” Another midrash, commenting on Psalms 91:15 (“He will call on Me and I will answer him; I will be with him in suffering”): “Now that My children are overburdened with suffering, will I remain at ease?”

The end of prophecy and the destruction of the Temple—God’s withdrawal from history—is balanced by His upwelling within man. His withdrawal, which sounds like a sad story, is no sadder than the story of a man’s growing up—for all the sad things that growing up might entail. God does not grow up but mankind does. The rabbis believed that if God had withdrawn “out of,” He had also withdrawn “into”: out of nature and history, into the four walls of the Jewish psyche. Thus a contraction or compression of sorts (or *tsimtsum*, a pivotal term in Jewish mysticism)—in line with the self-compression that once made it possible for God’s presence to occupy the perfect cube of the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple.

God’s withdrawal from history is no sad story, but is certainly a momentous transition. We can see *how* momentous by looking at the transition from Ark to ark, from the Ark of the Covenant that stood in the First Temple to the holy ark that stands in every synagogue today.

At first, God’s word was “centralized” in the Holy of Holies. Later, God’s word was everywhere Jews were. This is a direct embodiment of the kabbalistic idea of a primordial, cataclysmic shattering and scattering of God’s presence. But this shattering and scattering is no cosmic catastrophe; it is salvation. It gives exile a purpose. By aggregating a large number of small contributions—four *amot* per Jew—it provides nothing less than a dwelling place for God.

In the teachings of the seminal 16th-century kabbalist Isaac Luria, writes Gershom Scholem, “the exile of Israel ceases to be a punishment for error or a test of faith. It becomes something greater and deeper, a symbolic mission.” But many centuries before Luria, the Babylonian Talmud had already hinted at this mission of dispersed Israel: to be God’s abode in the universe.

The Temple is gone, but henceforth any Jew can

reach God—merely by walking into a synagogue and opening the holy ark. And more: the ark becomes a symbol of the Jew himself; the Torah is God’s presence within him.

If God’s power is the power to speak to man from inside, man’s power is either to hear or to ignore. Hence, prayer. Jewish prayers do sometimes lodge requests or make demands on God. But their real point is to increase a Jew’s chances of hearing and heeding the still, small voice. Jews at prayer are purposefully tuning and fiddling with a delicate spiritual circuit in hopes of picking up that voice.

It goes without saying that most people (including most Jews) do not hear, or at any rate do not heed, the still, small voice. It also goes without saying that, in the present state of the universe, God will not intervene to change this state of affairs. For God to assume (or resume) the power to rearrange the world from the outside will require a fundamental transformation. Religious Jews hope fervently for just such a transformation, which is to say that they hope for the coming of the messiah; this is an article of faith, one of Maimonides’ thirteen. But Jews also believe that it is mankind’s responsibility, not God’s, to cause this transformation and to bring the messiah. In fact, they believe it is *their* responsibility, the Jewish nation’s.

The Talmud tells a story. One day, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi discovers the messiah on earth, sitting among the wretched poor at the city gate. He asks: when will you come? The answer: today—if you will only listen to His voice.

Jews are vividly aware that God has surrendered His power over history. They accept that (in consequence) only man and not God can transform the universe and bring the messiah. But they wish and sometimes pray for things to be otherwise. The prayer makes no logical sense but its emotional justification is clear. The eminent Talmud scholar and death-camp survivor Rabbi David Weiss Halivni cites one prayer in particular as “uniquely characterizing” Jewish prayer in Nazi death camps. It was the Rosh Hashanah prayer asking God to “rule over all the world in Your glory”—imploring Him, as Halivni puts it, “to take the reins of government back into His hands.”

BUT WE are not done with the Bible, which gives us the basis for the idea of God as an internal not external phenomenon, manifest not in nature or history but within the human mind.

Picture Elijah at Horeb: he is told to come out of his cave and “stand on the mountain before the Lord.” There he watches and waits, like a spectator

with his eyes on the stage. The spectacle takes place before him—wind, earthquake, fire—but God is not there, not in nature. Yet for all we know, the still, small voice might have been speaking from the very beginning; what with the noise of a “great and powerful wind,” and then an earthquake, and then a fire, you couldn’t have heard it even if you had tried. The Bible is well aware of God’s presence within man’s mind, but for Jews to hear that still, small voice required the destruction of the Temple and the onset of a catastrophic silence.

It has always been understood that Elijah models himself on Moses. The medieval commentator Rabbi David Kimchi tells us that the word “passed” in the story of Elijah at Horeb—“the Lord passed by, and a great and powerful wind split mountains”—is the same “passed” as in Moses’ experience of the divine presence on the same mountain: “The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed: the Lord, the Lord, a compassionate and gracious God. . . .” So if we follow Horeb back, we reach Moses’ experience of divine revelation in a cave on the mountain; before that, the revelation of the Ten Commandments to all Israel at Sinai; before that, Moses and the burning bush at “the mountain of God—Horeb.” (The apocryphal Second Book of Maccabees holds that, after the destruction of the First Temple, the prophet Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant in the same cave on the same mountain.)

Suppose Moses were to look in a mirror that showed him the psychic, spiritual truth about himself. Hamlet says to his mother: “You go not till I set you up a glass/ Where you may see the inmost part of you.” What would Moses have seen in Hamlet’s glass? He is a fiery, passionate man. He burns with a sense of mission. In the very first deed of Moses that the Bible ever reports, he kills with one powerful stroke an Egyptian who is beating a Jew. But someone saw him do it, and he is forced to run for his life. All alone with Jethro’s flock in the wilds of Midian, “at the back of the wilderness,” what thoughts would he be turning over? “I have seen indeed, *seen* the affliction of My people in Egypt, and I have heard their screams in the face of their taskmasters; I do know their sufferings” (Exodus 3:7).

Seething at Egyptian oppression, capable of great passionate deeds: it fits perfectly that Moses should take it on himself to lead his people to freedom. Naturally he would agonize over his ability to carry the thing off—“The man Moses was very humble, more so than any man on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3)—but knowing him as we do, we know that, in the end, he could only have

screwed his courage to the sticking point and set off. And returning to Hamlet’s glass, how would the “inmost part” of Moses have *appeared*? A “bush burning with fire; yet the bush is not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). That would be perfect: a midrash speaks of this bush (or “thornbush”) as the humblest of trees; and on fire but “not consumed” is a perfect picture of Moses, who dies (we are told at the end of Deuteronomy) with “his eyes undimmed and his powers unabated.”

“I have seen indeed, *seen* the affliction of my people in Egypt.” The voice is the voice of Moses, but of course God is speaking. The burning bush is a perfect embodiment of Moses—it is a theme-picture of Moses’ inner mind, just as the inward spiral is a theme-picture of Judaism as a whole—but of course it is God’s self-revelation. For Moses, this encounter with God is an encounter with his own psyche; God *reveals Moses to himself*. God embodies Himself in the form not merely of a burning bush but of a man’s innermost thoughts. The Bible is obsessed with the “inner man,” with the spiritual and psychological truth.

THERE ARE Bible stories—dream stories—where God speaks explicitly from within man’s mind. For example, Jacob’s dream of the ladder to heaven. And there are Bible stories where man argues with God. The Lord occasions the Jew’s bitterness, angriest denunciations. “Will you *actually*,” demands Abraham, “sweep away the just with the wicked?” “The Judge of the whole earth, not to do justice?” (Genesis 18:23, 25). “Shall one man sin,” Moses and Aaron ask, “and You rage against the whole community?” (Numbers 16:22). Jeremiah wonders: “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?” (12:1). This ongoing argument with God is one of Judaism’s most important explicit themes; it occurs throughout Jewish history. And the Bible also combines these two themes, in powerful stories where man’s struggle with God is simultaneously a struggle with himself.

Back further toward the start of biblical history—to the moment at which Jacob becomes Israel, and Israel’s history begins. Jacob is on his way home—the same home from which he had (like Moses) run for his life. Years ago he had deceived Isaac, his dying father, into giving him the blessing meant for his elder brother Esau. Esau had been crushed; had resolved to kill Jacob. Now, returning home, Jacob is afraid of meeting Esau, and guilt-ridden on account of Esau and (even more) on account of his dead father. “Jacob was very frightened, and in anguish.” He prays desperately:

"Please save me from my brother's hand, from Esau's hand." After bedding down, he gets up again restlessly and moves half his household across the Yabbok river. And then, "Jacob was left alone."

What should have happened that night to frightened, guilt-ridden Jacob? A good night's sleep? More likely, struggle: with *himself*, his guilt and his fear. And indeed Jacob does spend the whole night struggling, "until daybreak." Who is his opponent? The Bible tells us that Jacob wrestles with a mysterious attacker—maybe a man, maybe God; the story cannot quite bring him into focus. ("A man struggled with him until daybreak"; but later Jacob says, "I have seen God face-to-face.") We do know that, at first (as Rabbi Naftali Tsvi Yehuda Berlin emphasizes in his commentary), Jacob is overwhelmed, but at the end he has the upper hand.

Commentators ancient and modern are at a loss. Who *is* this mysterious opponent, and why does he fight with Jacob? (When Jacob demands to know the attacker's name, the frustrating answer comes: "Why this asking about my name?") The commentators have proposed angels, aroused spirits, and local daemons (see Nahum Sarna's *Genesis*, 1989), but the text mentions no angel, no spirit, no daemon, just "a man" and "God." Robert Alter is surely right in his *Genesis* commentary (1996) that "Jacob's mysterious opponent is an externalization of all that Jacob has to wrestle with within himself." We can only understand this story in terms of Jacob's own psyche and Hamlet's glass.

But Alter omits the most compelling piece of evidence for his thesis, which is this: before fleeing home twenty years earlier, Jacob's last guilty act had been—what? To extract a blessing. Ordinarily, blessings in the Bible are freely given. But this blessing had been meant for his elder brother and Jacob had deceived his blind, failing father into conferring it on him instead. Now, two decades later, on the night before his return home, a mysterious assailant asks Jacob to let him go—"release me, for the dawn rises"—and Jacob answers: "I will not release you except you bless me."

Sleepwalking Lady Macbeth, making as if to wash her hands, reenacts the night of her sin and crime. Jacob too reenacts his sin. But this time he does it honorably, not deceitfully but openly, after long hours of combat hand to hand. And so—perhaps—he lays his guilt to rest at last.

Jacob's is no phantom struggle; it is as real as Lady Macbeth's. It is as real as a struggle can be. God leads man into the dark wood of his own self. "It is not in the heavens"; man encounters God inside.

THAT STILL, small voice you hear: *is* it the genuine voice of God, or is it merely the human stirrings of your all-too-human mind?

The Bible knows that sometimes it is hard to tell. Listen once more to the story of Elijah at Horeb. First came the wind, and "the Lord was not in the wind"; after the wind came the earthquake, and "the Lord was not in the earthquake"; and after the earthquake, fire, and "the Lord was not in the fire." After the fire came a still, small voice. The parallel structure of the text makes us expect a phrase to follow, but it is missing. "The Lord was not in the still, small voice" would have been wrong—but the text does not say that He *was* in the still, small voice either.

Is it God's voice? When "the Lord called to Samuel," the child Samuel (eventually to become the prophet Samuel) runs to the priest Eli and says: "Here I am, since you called me." It can be hard to tell, even for a prophet-to-be. Yet this strange Jewish people, famous for its skepticism, always reserving its right to doubt, cannot seem to get God off its mind. Jews insist on their right to condemn God's justice vividly, violently—and to take their complaints straight to God. ("Will You *actually* sweep away the just with the wicked?") In their unending conversations with Him, they insist that they are not sure He exists. They deny Him in a language whose every word implies that He lives. Ultimately they can no more deny His reality than their own, because He is part of them and they are His dwelling place.

The deepest, most moving expression of the Jewish art of affirming by denying is in the Talmud—in a famous passage (Menachot 29b) in which the rabbis imagine Moses and God in conversation. God has just shown Moses a vision of Rabbi Akiba martyred, hideously torn to death by the Romans. This is a moment of crisis at the very heart of the rabbinic enterprise, a whirlpool at the ocean's center. Moses asks God in anguish: "Master of the Universe, this is Torah, and *this* the reward?" All God can answer is "Quiet; that too has occurred to Me." Sometimes, the Talmud concedes, even God cannot believe in God.

Is it good or bad to have God inside you? "In every single generation," the Passover Haggadah says, "they rise against us to destroy us." Then the Haggadah adds—with bitter irony because it is false?—or plain bitterness insofar as it is true?—"and the Holy One Blessed be He saves us from their hands." So long as Jews exist, God will be present on earth and Jews will suffer for it.

Paying for Jefferson's Sins

Algis Valiunas

AT A moment when national unity has assumed special importance, a novel demand by a group of black activists is raising the possibility that race relations in the U.S. are about to take an especially divisive turn. What the nascent movement wants is, in brief, financial reparations, and not for any present-day wrong but for the historic crimes of slavery and segregation. Some advocates of reparations have put the squeeze on particular businesses, like the insurance companies—many of them still in existence—that wrote policies for slaves in their masters' names. Others have called for a vast program of spending on education and physical rehabilitation in poorer black neighborhoods. Still others have staged an assault on the U.S. Treasury, demanding a substantial lump-sum payment to each black American.

At the "Millions for Reparations" rally held on the mall in Washington, D.C. this past August, the air was filled with chants of "Black power!" and "Start the revolution!" Charles Barron, a New York City councilman (and former Black Panther), told the gathered crowd, "I want to go up to the closest white person and say, 'You can't understand this, it's a black thing,' and then slap him, just for my mental health." Such better-known inciters as Louis Farrakhan, Al Sharpton, Johnnie Cochran, and Jesse Jackson have also rallied to the cause. On

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Capitol Hill, Representative John Conyers, the dean of the Congressional Black Caucus and the senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, has pressed for the creation of a federal commission to study the issue.

As the advocates of reparations see it, American society is corrupt at its source. All white Americans have profited from this historical corruption; all black Americans have suffered from it. What remains is for white Americans to take responsibility for the nation's original sin, and in particular for the acts of the founding fathers who brought the country into being.

Among the alleged malefactors of the early republic, none is held to be more odious than Thomas Jefferson. When the sins of the fathers are recited, the failings deemed most egregious tend to be his. Jefferson's life illustrates more neatly than any other the disparity between what America promised and what it delivered, a disparity that remains, in the words of NAACP chairman Julian Bond, "our greatest state embarrassment today." And the reason Jefferson has become the most notorious slave master in American history is that, we are told, he ought to have been the last man ever to hold others in bondage.

HOSTING A dinner for American Nobel laureates, President John F. Kennedy lauded the assembled eminences as "the most extraordinary collection of talents . . . that has ever been gathered

together at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone." The encomium, intended as a witty bow to an acknowledged superior, also reflected a certain barbed ambivalence toward real genius. Jefferson had his violin, his architecture, his library full of classical sages, his collection of mastodon bones. Kennedy had his molls and his James Bond novels, and must seldom have dined alone; he wished to be thought of, and he may have been thought of, as the most intellectually vital President we had had for a long time, but a chasm separated his mind from that of Jefferson.

Everything, absolutely everything, fascinated Thomas Jefferson. He helped to found and served as president of the American Philosophical Society, which devoted itself less to rarefied speculation than to practical concerns in the great American can-do spirit. Father of the University of Virginia, he foresaw the advance of learning into a future whose shape no one could predict but that, he was confident, would leave the past in the dust, giving men greater power over harsh inhuman nature and unruly human nature. Although his classical learning was rich and deep, his heroes were the giants of modern thought—Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, John Locke. He professed Christianity but in his own defiant fashion, blaming churchmen down the generations for the sophisticated perversion of Jesus' simple and wholly admirable teaching.

In politics, Jefferson had the "vision thing" in abundance. If, as Plato teaches, poets are the creators of the gods, then Jefferson is our arch-poet; he breathed life into the American household deities of equality and liberty. To John Adams he declared his faith in a natural aristocracy of virtue and talent—"the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trust, and government of society"—and in the ability of the democratic masses to separate the genuine aristocrats from the pretenders. Picked by the Continental Congress to draft the Declaration of Independence, he formulated the new nation's creed with such eloquence that every American now swears by his best-known words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty & the pursuit of happiness."

APPLYING THESE high-minded notions to practical affairs was another matter, and one at which Jefferson was notably less successful. As minister plenipotentiary to France from 1784 to 1789,

he was filled with republican contempt at the antics of royalty: the king, he wrote, "hunts one half the day, is drunk the other, and signs whatever he is bid." But he utterly failed to see what the French Revolution would bring, and his predictions of bloodless constitutional reform seem ludicrously sunny in retrospect. More disturbing was his readiness to believe that, come what may, glorious republican virtue would eventually sprout from the reddened Parisian streets.

A decade later, as the nation's third President, Jefferson again struggled to accommodate his principles to the contingencies of political life. Though the strictest of strict interpreters of the Constitution—he had branded his predecessor in the White House a virtual tyrant for the egregious overreaching of the Alien and Sedition Acts—he soon faced constitutional difficulties of his own in the form of the Louisiana Purchase. As he wrote to one Senator, "The Constitution has made no provision for our holding foreign territory, still less of incorporating foreign nations into our Union." Yet, in the name of American greatness, Jefferson himself bulldozed these pesky niceties, not without qualms but trusting that the occasion justified his offenses against the law.

Sticking with principle often served Jefferson no better. Considering war to be a relic of an Old World immorality that the New World in its purity ought to avoid, he responded to English aggression on the high seas with a widening circle of merely commercial sanctions, none of which worked in the least. Worse, his naive measures, which eventually extended to the treacherous French as well, wrought severe economic and moral harm at home. As Henry Adams would later observe in his monumental history of the period:

The peaceable coercion which Jefferson tried to substitute for war was less brutal, but hardly less mischievous, than the evil it displaced. The embargo opened the sluice-gates of social corruption. Every citizen was tempted to evade or defy the laws. Every article produced or consumed in the country became an object of speculation; every form of industry became a form of gambling.

These episodes in Jefferson's career have led historians to wonder whether his legendary brain-power found its optimal use in political life, or whether his devotion to metaphysical subtleties was allowed to interfere too often for the nation's good with the urgent demands of practice. But for all this may suggest about Jefferson's weaknesses as a

public man, it is nothing as compared with the unsettling questions raised by his relationship to slavery. Here, as the strident advocates of reparations appreciate, nothing less is at stake than his moral stature.

As a leading member of Virginia's landed gentry, Jefferson came into a hefty inheritance in human flesh and blood. His father left him 52 slaves, and his father-in-law, John Wayles, left him 135 more, ranking him second among slave masters in Albemarle County. Wayles also bequeathed to Jefferson a sizable debt, which he paid off in part by selling slaves.

Jefferson was known to sell or buy a slave in order to keep a family together, a benevolent-seeming practice for which, however, it is hard to give him much credit. As he told a correspondent, in such instances the requirements of humanity and sound business happily agreed: when slaves married within "the family"—that is, with other slaves on the same plantation—they were "worth a great deal more . . . than when they have husbands and wives abroad." In a similar vein, Jefferson thought it not only decent but financially responsible to give easier chores to slave women with infants, for turning out a new child every two years contributed more to the master's prosperity than the labor of the hardest-working field hand ever could. "In this, as in all other cases," he wrote, "providence has made our interest and our duties coincide perfectly."

Jefferson's more general opinions about blacks received their fullest expression in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1782). They reveal a stark and unabashed repugnance. He found blacks physically ugly, and declared that they themselves agreed in this estimate, showing a marked preference for the figures and features of whites. Since blacks urinated less and sweated more than whites, they gave off "a very strong and disagreeable odor." They were brave enough, but their bravery, he speculated, stemmed from a childish incapacity to appreciate oncoming danger. Lust, rather than the tender sentiments of love, ran strong in them. Their memory was sharp, but their imagination was stunted and insipid, and their powers of reasoning were "much inferior"; Euclid stumped the best of them. Telling a simple story was about as far as they went in evidencing the signs of consecutive thought.

What explained these deficiencies? In ancient Rome, Jefferson wrote, slaves had suffered conditions far harsher than those of American blacks, and yet among them had arisen artists and thinkers of real distinction. It must be, then, that the condi-

tion of slavery itself was not responsible for the shortcomings of blacks; it must be the doing of nature. Yet Jefferson scrupulously edged away from this conclusion, proposing "as a suspicion only" that blacks were inferior to whites "in the endowments both of body and mind."

Where nature had *not* stinted the endowment of blacks, Jefferson emphasized, was in strength of heart, in the moral sense; there "she will be found to have done them justice." And, without diminishing the brutal harshness of the opinions enumerated above, it is important to register that, for Jefferson, this was no faint or condescending praise. In his view, the fundamental human desire for goodness and justice resided not in the intelligence, which notoriously served the baser passions and led men astray, but in our capacity for ethical sentiments. By Jefferson's lights, as Garry Wills observed in *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (1978), "The moral sense is not only man's highest faculty, but the one that is *equal* in all men."

WHAT, THEN, of Jefferson's own moral sense? What we can say for a certainty is that it did not allow him to rest easy with the incontrovertible evil of slavery. Though in his original draft of the Declaration of Independence he had laid the blame for this distinctively American institution on, of all people, King George III, there was at least no mistaking the seriousness of the crime. The English king, Jefferson wrote, had "waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither."

Nor was Jefferson blind to the complicity—and corruption—of his own class. "The whole commerce between master and slave," he wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it." Later in the same passage comes a famous outcry of guilty fear that can leave no doubt as to the state of his own conscience:

I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature, and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among

possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.

As for remedies, Jefferson pronounced himself in favor of slavery's abolition; but he also feared that whites and free blacks would never be able to live together in peace. Contempt on one side and desire for vengeance on the other made a race war all but inevitable. Thus, he insisted, emancipation would have to be paired with a suitable plan for the humane resettlement of freed slaves in Africa—a condition visionary enough to push the whole vexed question, including the status of his own slaves, safely into the future.

In short, though Jefferson deplored the institution of slavery, he could not bring himself to resist it. His sentiments were those of a man deeply aware of his and his country's wrongdoing, but his actions were those of a complacent squire, loath to give up the plantation life for which he had so pronounced a taste.

DAMNING AS this posture appears in principle and in general, its ugliness has been magnified by what we now know—or, in any event, have reason to believe—about Jefferson's own relationship to the people who were his property, particularly the young woman named Sally Hemings.

The Hemings "affair" has become the chief particular in the indictment against Jefferson, but it is hardly news. In his 1973 historical novel, *Burr*, Gore Vidal has the title character recall a faux pas he once committed by assuming that a child he saw at Monticello was the master's grandson. The blushing Jefferson replied, "That is a child of the place. A Hemings, I think." As the character of Burr goes on to observe (in Vidal's unmistakable sneer):

Since the child was obviously son or grandson to him, I had seriously blundered and, as in law, ignorance is not a defense. It was a curious sensation to look about Monticello and see everywhere so many replicas of Jefferson and his father-in-law. It was as if we had all of us been transformed into dogs, and as a single male dog can re-create in his own image an entire canine community, so Jefferson and his family had grafted their powerful strain upon these slave Africans, and like a king dog (or the Sultan at the Grande Porte) Jefferson could now look about him and see everywhere near-perfect consanguinity.

What *is* new is the supposedly hard evidence that now links Jefferson to Sally Hemings. I say "supposedly" because the source of this evidence, the DNA tests described in a headline-grabbing 1998 article in the scientific journal *Nature*, were hardly definitive. As Eugene Foster, one of the researchers who conducted the tests, pointed out in a letter to the *New York Times*, "the genetic findings that my collaborators and I reported . . . do not prove that Thomas Jefferson was the father of one of Sally Hemings's children. We never made that claim."

It is a question with a long and a cheap history, freely drawn upon by Vidal in his own cheap attack. In 1802, during Jefferson's first presidential term, James Callender, a noted purveyor of scurrility whom Jefferson had employed to scorch his political enemies, turned on his patron. Weaving rumors into front-page news, Callender accused Jefferson in a Richmond newspaper of having "kept, as a concubine, one of his own slaves." The opposition press squeezed the story to the last venomous drop. Poetasters composed ditties about "long Tom" and "sooty Sal." An abler poet, the Englishman Thomas Moore, who had met Jefferson, let him have it with finer skill but no greater delicacy: "The patriot, fresh from Freedom's council come, / Now pleased retires to lash his slaves at home; / Or woo, perhaps some black Aspasia's charms, / And dream of freedom in his bondsmaid's arms."

Jefferson himself kept silent on the matter (with the possible exception of a private letter he wrote in 1805 that hints at a denial), but after his death his family vehemently rejected the story. His granddaughter Ellen Randolph Coolidge wrote to her brother-in-law in 1858, "The thing will not bear telling. There are such things, after all, as moral impossibilities." She named Jefferson's nephew, Peter Carr, "the most notorious good-natured Turk that ever was master of a black seraglio kept at other men's expense," as the father of Sally Hemings's children. On the other hand, Sally's son Madison Hemings told an Ohio reporter in 1873 that his mother began having sexual relations with her master when she was a fifteen-year-old body servant to Jefferson's young daughter and he was minister to France. She bore him four children, he declared, and all were freed upon reaching adulthood—the only slaves Jefferson ever emancipated—in accordance with a promise he had made to Sally while they were in France, where she could have chosen to remain as a free woman.

Until recently, scholars tended to believe the denials of the white Jeffersons and to discredit the as-

sections of the black Hemingses. In this regard, the 1998 DNA study had something for everybody. Though it established that one reputed son of Jefferson was unrelated to him, it showed that another, Eston Hemings, carried the Jefferson Y-chromosome. But some 25 adult male Jeffersons with this chromosome were living in Virginia at the time in question, and several of them had definitely been to Monticello. This was the source of Dr. Foster's unwillingness to speak of clear proof. Still, as he went on to write in his letter to the *Times*, when all the relevant considerations of time and place were taken into account, the "simplest and most probable" explanation for the data was that the child was Thomas Jefferson's.

At the very least, it is clear that Jefferson was guilty of terrible moral carelessness. As the historian Paul Rahe has observed, "Despite the distaste that he expressed for the propensity of slaveholders and their relatives to abuse their power, Jefferson either engaged in such abuse himself or tolerated it on the part of one or more members of his extended family." Yet even to speak of Jefferson's abuse of authority in this case misses the point: it was within his authority to do whatever he pleased with Sally Hemings, and everyone knows what absolute power does.

WHICH BRINGS us back to reparations. Jefferson is singled out for opprobrium in Randall Robinson's *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (2000), the unofficial handbook of the movement. To Robinson's (mistaken) mind, it has been "conclusively proved through DNA comparisons" that Jefferson fathered at least one of Sally Hemings's children. That some would nevertheless defend Jefferson, especially on the grounds that he was no worse than many another "man of his time," moves Robinson not at all. He ransacks history for comparable instances of men whose contemporaries and compatriots thought well of them and who nevertheless committed unspeakable deeds: "the same specious excuse can be offered for Atatürk or Franco or Lenin or Mao or Hitler." As he sees it, American chattel slavery represents the worst thing men have done to each other for at least the past 500 years, and Jefferson's complicity in this "black Holocaust" marks him as one of history's grossest monsters.

It is easy enough to fault Robinson for portraying slavery not as just one of the unconscionable enormities of modern history but as the ultimate moral horror. He suffers from a case of what might be called genocide envy, a craving for the special

luster that putatively clings to the victims of the worst crime known to man. One wonders what he would say if 18th-century Americans had simply set out to exterminate black Africans like vermin, rather than to work them like beasts of burden.

Robinson is right, however, in refusing to exonerate Jefferson on the grounds that he merely did what everybody else was doing. Once you head down that route, nothing is wrong provided that the cultural norms of the day declare it right. Furthermore, there were other men, even in Jefferson's Virginia, who knew slavery was wrong and who acted on that knowledge. Although this conclusion has been resisted by those who still cling to the legend of Jefferson the spotless egalitarian, his reputation, like the principles he so eloquently espoused, can withstand intellectual honesty. Whatever the ugly facts of his slave-owning, he remains one of the greatest men this country has ever produced.

What the reparations movement itself gains from such a reckoning is much less clear. Jefferson and some of the other founders may indeed need to pay a debt, in terms of historical esteem, for their participation in slavery, but how can this impose a financial burden on present-day American society as a whole, and white Americans in particular?

As David Horowitz forcefully contends in his recent book, *Uncivil Wars: The Controversy over Reparations for Slavery* (2001),* few Americans ever owned slaves, even in the South. Moreover, whites were not uniquely responsible for slavery; the Africans who wound up in America were captured and sold by Arabs and other blacks. Nor were whites the only beneficiaries of slavery. The average income of blacks in the U.S. now runs 20 to 50 times that of Africans in the countries that American slaves came from. If black America were considered a nation all its own, its per-capita GNP would rank today tenth in the world. As Horowitz concludes, nowhere else in the world are black people so prosperous and privileged, "a bounty that is a direct result of the [democratic] heritage that is under assault."

Like other critics of reparations, Horowitz stresses the obvious historical truth that the U.S. has already paid a considerable toll for slavery, in the form of 350,000 Union dead in the Civil War. Robinson and other advocates of reparations have greeted this claim with smug indifference or even derision, contending that the men of the North fought not to dismantle slavery but to defend their

* Reviewed by Jacob Heilbrunn in the April 2002 COMMENTARY.

own economic and political interests. A useful arbiter on this question is the black intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), who would become the patron saint of black nationalism. As he wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much those who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict.

CONSIDERING THE impressive economic and political strides that many black Americans have made over the past several decades, it is fair to wonder why the reparations movement has emerged at this particular moment, and with such extreme demands. Much of the answer, as Jefferson himself would have appreciated, has to do with the notoriously elusive commodity of equality: the more one has of it, the more galling become those inequalities that remain.

For black Americans, the attainment of full equality before the law, ratified and extended by the civil-rights legislation of the 1960's, naturally begot the desire for equality of fortune, of outcome. When this was not forthcoming, something had to be blamed for the intolerable result, and white racism was quickly identified as the culprit.

What followed were the various remedies—unprecedented spending on education and welfare, racial preferences in universities, corporations, and professions—that black leaders demanded, and liberals readily granted, as compensation for the supposed persistence of discrimination. Today's proposals for actual cash reparations are but the latest, and most desperate, scheme for enabling America's blacks to overcome their chronic ills by imposing atonement on America's whites for their racial sins.

By now, however, it is impossible to believe that a mere lack of financial resources is the essential problem of American blacks. As we have learned in recent years through the work of writers like Thomas Sowell, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom, and John McWhorter, the roots of our racial divide are overwhelmingly cultural. Why does black academic achievement, even in the growing black middle class, persistently lag behind that of other Americans? Why does anti-intellectualism remain such a problem among black students? Why have so many seemingly unassimilable immigrants succeeded in the U.S. at the same time that a considerable portion of black America remains mired in poverty and dependence?

The reparations movement is not an answer to these questions. Indeed, doomed though it is to failure—even the most reflexively sympathetic liberals have declined to join so outlandish a cause—it has already become a problem in itself, diverting the black community from the reckoning it must do with its own history, a reckoning far more urgent than any to be undertaken with the towering ghost of Thomas Jefferson.

Fishing for Cancer

David Schoenbrod

AMONG PRESIDENT Bush's critics during his first two years in office—setting aside the area of foreign policy—none has been more vocal or more effective than the environmental movement. On one issue after another, from the Kyoto protocol on global warming to the permissible levels of arsenic in drinking water, the administration has been put on the defensive, fending off charges that it is a tool of corporate America and a reckless steward of public health no less than of imperiled nature.

Given its reputation, it might come as a surprise to learn that in fact the Bush administration has time and again acted in conformity with the environmental movement's strictures and against its own putative predilections. Thus, it decided in the end to reaffirm the Clinton administration's standards on arsenic as well as its strict new standards for ozone pollution, called for strengthening the Clean Air Act, imposed stiff penalties on truck manufacturers, and more. Most strikingly of all, Christine Todd Whitman, the Bush appointee who now heads the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), announced in August 2001 that General Electric (GE) would have to foot the bill for dredging the upper reaches of the Hudson River of the PCB's—polychlorinated biphenyls—that the com-

pany discharged into the waterway over the course of several decades. And thereby hangs a most instructive tale.

Since first discovered in the Hudson in the 1970's, PCB's have been accused of causing cancer, birth defects, infertility, and nervous-system disorders. The clean-up was necessary, Whitman declared, to reduce "risks to humans and ecological receptors" in the Hudson River Valley all the way from GE's facilities to New York City 200 miles to the south. Although the EPA is still pondering the exact scope of the operation, it will entail, at a minimum, dredging up 2.65 million cubic yards of sediment along a 40-mile stretch of the river. The EPA expects the project to take five years and cost GE close to a half-billion dollars; the eventual cost could well be much higher.

But even at this late date, with GE having ended its protracted legal battle against the decision, the largest and most basic question remains: is cleansing the Hudson of PCB's worth doing?

GENERAL ELECTRIC began using PCB's at its two plants north of Albany in the 1940's. The plants made capacitors: metal cans, some as large as barrels, whose electrical innards had to be submerged in a coolant. Mineral oil had served this purpose, but it was dangerously flammable; as a safety measure, GE switched to the more expensive but nonflammable PCB's.

Located on low cliffs above the Hudson, the

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plants operated according to the lax environmental standards of the day. Workers would send the dregs from a container of PCB's out with the waste water. The oily chemical often spilled out onto the factory's rock floor and disappeared into the interstices of the cliffs. No one at the plants gave much thought to where the PCB's were going; they did not come marked with a skull and crossbones, and at the time, chemicals were presumed innocuous unless labeled otherwise. A neighbor of mine in upstate New York worked at one of the GE plants during this era, and he and his colleagues toiled up to their elbows in PCB's all day long, sometimes not bothering to wash the stuff off before sitting down for lunch.

When the EPA began regulating water pollution in the early 1970's, GE informed the agency that it was discharging PCB's into the Hudson and received permits to continue doing so. Because the chemical is heavier than water and clings to soil particles, most of it had come to rest in sediment piled up behind a dam just downstream from the GE plants. When the owner of the dam tore it down in 1973 with the approval of federal and state agencies, more than a million cubic yards of PCB-contaminated sediment spread down the river. Two years later, an environmental investigator detected high levels of the substance in fish caught far downstream.

With the environmental movement now in full swing, scientists made it a priority to investigate the health effects of exposure to PCB's, which have a chemical structure similar to that of DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloro-ethane), the insecticide that Rachel Carson had declared public enemy number one in her influential 1962 book, *Silent Spring*. One of the first studies, by Renate Kimbrough, then a scientist at the federal Centers for Disease Control, showed that rodents heavily dosed with PCB's developed liver tumors. Not long after, Congress banned the use of the chemical, and then in 1980 passed the Superfund law, giving the EPA sweeping authority to force polluters, even those who had no reason at the time to know they were doing anything dangerous, to clean up toxic-waste sites.

WHY, THEN, did it take the EPA another twenty years to reach a decision about the PCB's in the Hudson? A large part of the problem was the scientific evidence, which turned out to be less ironclad than it at first had appeared. No one questioned that PCB's produced cancer in laboratory animals. But such tests are often poor predic-

tors of the threat to humans, not only because of obvious biological differences but also because the dose given to laboratory animals usually far exceeds what people are exposed to. The typical procedure is to administer to a set of rodents as much of a chemical as possible without killing them outright. Such a test cannot prove that a chemical causes cancer—as researchers point out, chronic inflammation from extreme doses can cause cancer even if a particular chemical is not carcinogenic at normal doses—but it can help to exclude from further study those that most likely do not.

Far more conclusive for gauging the threat posed by a chemical, especially as a potential cause of cancer, is information about its long-term impact on a large human population. But here the data on PCB's told a very different story. Because of her reputation for independence, Renate Kimbrough, the researcher whose findings suggested that PCB's were a carcinogen, was funded by GE in the mid-1990's to do an epidemiological survey of the employees who, more than twenty years earlier, had worked with the chemical at its plants on the Hudson. She found that they died from cancer no more often than other Americans. Only one abnormality was uncovered in the many studies of GE workers: a small percentage of those exposed to massive doses of PCB's developed chloracne, a temporary, acne-like skin condition. Taken as a whole, studies of workers exposed to PCB's elsewhere also showed no greater incidence of cancer (or other serious diseases) than would be expected randomly.

As for the EPA's own scientists, although they concluded that PCB's in general may be the cause of serious diseases, they were unwilling to say that PCB's in the Hudson threatened the public. In a formal assessment of the potential health problems, they wrote in a crucial passage:

Cancer risks and noncancer health hazards from being exposed to PCB's in the river through skin contact with contaminated sediments and river water, incidental ingestion of sediments, inhalation of PCB's in air, and *consumption of river water as a drinking water source* are generally within or below [EPA's] levels of concern [emphasis added].

In other words, it was safe to drink the river water all day, every day.

What did concern the EPA's scientists was the consumption of contaminated fish from the river. Though the level of PCB's in the fish had dropped over the previous quarter-century, it was still high.

But even here, the threat was hardly dire. As the EPA itself put it, the risk was acceptable for those who ate fish caught in the upper Hudson (where the PCB concentrations are highest) up to six times a year. Dredging would make the fish in these upper reaches safe to eat again, according to the EPA, but not until new deposits of sediment covered the PCB's stirred up by the dredging itself. This would take about four decades. New York State, it should be noted, already bans the consumption of fish caught in the Hudson north of Albany.

And yet, despite the evidence of research, and despite the EPA's own scientific analysis, the agency told the public that PCB's in the Hudson were a grave danger. In an address to the New York State legislature, Carol Browner, the EPA administrator under Bill Clinton, stated that although "we don't have every single piece of data, . . . clearly, the science has spoken. PCB's [in the Hudson] are a serious threat." When the risk assessment cited above was issued under her auspices, the accompanying press release omitted any mention that the water had been found safe to drink by the agency's own scientists. And when Browner formally proposed that the river be dredged, the EPA's press release failed to mention that the only unacceptable risk came from regularly eating the fish caught north of Albany in defiance of a state ban.

Browner's successor, Christine Whitman, has similarly omitted any mention of this critical fact. EPA press releases label PCB's a "probable human carcinogen," a classification that does not require evidence based on human exposure.

PUT IN its best light, the EPA's insistence that GE dredge the Hudson can be seen as an application of what environmentalists call the "precautionary principle." The basic idea is both simple and sound: even when dealing with imperfect information, regulators are obliged to protect the public from serious potential threats. Certainly my own career as an environmental activist was inspired by this notion. Working as a litigator for the Natural Resources Defense Council in the 1970's, I led a campaign to force refiners to add less lead to gasoline. Though we (rightly) suspected, on the basis of emerging scientific evidence, that these additives were causing permanent brain damage to children, we could not prove it. But to its credit the EPA decided not to wait, and it was upheld by a federal court, which ruled that "the statutes and common sense demand regulatory action . . . even if the regulator is less than certain that harm is otherwise inevitable."

Such precaution makes particular sense in the case of chemicals for which no data exist concerning their effects on humans over several decades. PCB's, however, are one of the few sets of chemicals for which we do have such data, and we know the effects are not grave. This does not mean that they should go altogether unregulated. The chemical does cause chloracne, and there is reason to think it has interfered with the breeding habits of mink. Moreover, there is no avoiding the fact that, however extraordinary the experimental conditions, PCB's have caused cancer in laboratory animals. Though no link to cancer rates in humans has been established, one cannot be ruled out; perhaps it exists at a level too slight to be detected by the research that has been conducted so far.

The problem lies not in identifying such remote threats, but in treating them with a sense of proportion. After all, PCB's are hardly the only substances that, delivered in sufficiently large quantities, have produced cancer in laboratory animals. The same is true of about half of all "natural" substances in foods, and of slightly more than half of their synthetic counterparts. Banning all of these substances would leave a lot of empty shelves, including at the organic-food store.

Among the best discussions of what happens when one applies the precautionary principle too rigidly, and without a sense of proportion, is *Breaking the Vicious Circle: Towards Effective Risk Regulation* (1993), a book written by Stephen Breyer shortly before his appointment to the Supreme Court. As Breyer notes, the EPA has increasingly focused its regulatory attention on cancer risks that scientists consider minor, without adequate consideration of the burdens imposed by these measures. Indeed, in a textbook case of unintended consequences, regulators may have increased the risk of cancer by harping on the supposed dangers of various pesticides, thus deterring some people from eating the fruits and vegetables that are thought to play a far, far greater role in preventing the disease than pollutants do in causing it.

A better-known example of precaution run amok is the federal government's 1986 mandate that asbestos, a known carcinogen, be removed from every school building in the country. No one disputed that it made sense to clear away any loose asbestos that children might inhale. But as administered by EPA, the regulation mainly affected intact, encapsulated asbestos in school basements—a relatively minor threat. As a study published in *Science* pointed out, the risks from this source were "magnitudes lower than commonplace risks in modern

society”; moreover, the effort to remove every last particle of asbestos was dangerous in itself, often “lead[ing] to increases in airborne concentrations.” For no obvious net gain in public health, the regulation diverted billions of dollars from schools to environmental contractors.

GENERAL ELECTRIC has long maintained that the EPA would be making a monumental mistake in ordering the Hudson to be dredged. But after years of fighting the agency, the company has decided, for prudential reasons, to throw in the towel. Under the Superfund law, the price for failure in a legal challenge to the EPA order would be steep—a penalty three times higher than the already enormous cost of the dredging operation itself.

But GE is not the only interested party here. The dredging will also affect the people who live in this 40-mile stretch of the Hudson Valley. Of course, they will also reap the greatest benefits—such as they are likely to be. After the year 2040, locally caught fish will be safe to eat. Since, however, there has been no local commercial fishery in modern times, the only beneficiaries will be the area’s amateur anglers, the great majority of whom favor catch-and-release fishing at least as much as the catch-and-keep variety.

As for the local burdens, they will be heavy. The dredging will remove from the river bottom enough sediment to fill a line of rail cars stretching from New York to Chicago. The massive excavation project will center on the river front, which is to the local communities what Central Park is to Manhattan. Indeed, were such a massive construction project to be proposed in Manhattan, environmentalists invoking the precautionary principle would be taking to the barricades, for, exactly as with its program of asbestos removal, the EPA cannot prove that the dredging will not create more hazardous conditions than it abates. Those who live nearby oppose dredging by a margin of 63 percent to 30 percent.

In light of the history of this case, the real question is why the Bush administration has gone along with so profoundly ill-considered and locally unpopular a decision. The answer, one suspects, has nothing to do with the merits of the issue and everything to do with a desire to deprive environmentalists, and their friends in the Democratic party, of political ammunition. As a former official in Clinton’s Department of the Interior observed, in true partisan fashion, “Environmental issues are sapping the life out of Bush’s political viability, and the White House is trying to stop the bloodletting by allowing the dredging in the Hudson.”

After President Bush took office, major environmental groups fixed on a single strategy—crying murder—whenever the administration failed to fall into line, regardless of whether the matter at hand was large or small. For example, when the administration announced its intention to reconsider the Clinton administration’s last-minute decision to tighten the standards for arsenic in drinking water—not retract, but reconsider, just as the incoming Clinton administration had announced that it would reconsider the last-minute regulations of its predecessor—environmental groups projected maximum distress (even though they had uttered scarcely a peep during the eight years the Clinton administration temporized on this issue). The idea was that any explanations offered by the Bush administration would be drowned out by the vociferous charge that the President was killing people to enrich his corporate contributors.

The strategy worked, from the case of arsenic standards to the case of PCB’s in the Hudson. But it is also important to stress that, in implementing this strategy, the environmental organizations knew they could not act alone; they had to rely on the leading organs of the media to *report* “murder” whenever they cried it. And so they could: the press has regularly fed the public a grossly exaggerated picture of the environmental risks it faces, and PCB’s in the Hudson are once again a perfect exhibit.

FROM THE discovery of PCB’s in the Hudson in 1975 until the EPA’s final decision on dredging, the *New York Times* published 210 articles and editorials linking the chemicals’ presence in the river to one or another serious disease. Of these 210 items, fully 147 mentioned cancer, and not a single one of them tried to disabuse the presumption of most readers that chemicals causing cancer in lab animals pose a serious cancer threat to people. Of the 210 articles, only 26 mentioned that the science on PCB’s is inconclusive. Only one, concerning Renate Kimbrough’s critically important study of GE workers, mentioned up front the possibility that PCB’s in the river might not be dangerous, and then it added the insinuation that this was “not the first time that the cancer risks of PCB’s . . . have been played down by scientific studies.” Most startling of all, none of the articles in the *Times* mentioned that the EPA’s own risk assessment found the water in the river safe for swimming and drinking.

It is no secret that, as a class, journalists tend to be sympathetic to the agenda of environmental ad-

vocates, or that "Cancer Scare" makes a more arresting headline than "Carcinogen Debunked." In polling done for their illuminating book, *Environmental Cancer: A Political Disease?* (1999),* S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman found that mainstream cancer researchers disagreed sharply with the view that pollution is a major cause of cancer, and blamed the press for spreading this misconception. Asked to name the organized interests that were least credible on the issue of environmental cancer, the researchers gave the lowest ratings to the Tobacco Institute, environmental advocacy organizations, TV networks, and the *New York Times*.

The paper's scandalously poor reporting thus helped to produce a decision based on bad science and worse politics. In 1980, Congress voted for a proposition with immense popular support: that the EPA should rely on scientific analysis to identify dangerous toxic wastes and clean them up at the expense of those who caused them. The legislation instructed the agency to assess honestly what science showed was necessary to protect public health and the envi-

ronment. In the case of PCB's in the Hudson, EPA's own scientific analysis showed no need to dredge.

The EPA compounded the damage by falsely suggesting that dredging was necessary to protect not only the locals who opposed it but the tens of millions of people living downstream. The *Times's* own signature contribution to this situation was to picture local opposition as reflecting little more than a knee-jerk rejection of big government and a know-nothing refusal to come to grips with the EPA's findings. The upshot was a purely political decision, dressed up as a scientific decision in order to silence critics.

Environmentalists and their sympathizers are not alone in misleading the public; nor do all environmental decisions qualify as abuses of the precautionary principle. But the combination of politicized science and media bias, which has already resulted in the expensive, disruptive, and wholly unnecessary decision to dredge the Hudson, is a real and growing danger. Precaution in environmental matters is a good idea, but one that makes sense for its advocates too.

* Reviewed by Dan Seligman in COMMENTARY, May 1999.

You Could Also Love a Rich Girl

A Story

Joseph Epstein

THE WEEK after Ronald Block, my associate editor of two years, left to take a job at *Newsweek*, I put an ad in the *New York Times* classifieds. "Wanted," it read, "editor for small-circulation political weekly of liberal tendencies. Duties include writing editorials, soliciting manuscripts, working with contributors' copy, proofreading. Benefits. Modest salary to begin." The magazine's name did not appear, and the return address was a P.O. box.

I received 158 responses. Perhaps the most astonishing came from a plastic surgeon who claimed to be making upward of a million dollars a year but had to stoke himself in the morning with two shots of bourbon in order to begin, as he called it, "the day's carvery." More than 30 lawyers applied. Nine among them, in notes accompanying their résumés, remarked that salary was not a problem. Another respondent, a senior partner at Goldman Sachs, offered to buy the magazine outright without even knowing its name, adding that he would be perfectly content, even as the owner, to hold down a secondary editorial position.

After sifting through the mound I set up interviews with seven candidates who I thought showed serious potential. All were under thirty: what with the low pay, it seemed sensible to hire someone just start-

ing out, and I wanted a person not yet fully formed, someone I could mold to the needs of the magazine.

In the end I chose a young man named Sanford Aronson. He was then twenty-seven, from St. Louis. He had gone to Brown, dropped out of Harvard Law after deciding that the law wasn't for him, and then worked briefly for McKinsey, the consulting firm, which gave him a chance at the big bucks. But in the end, or so he said in our interview, money wasn't his main objective, at least not now. What interested him more was gaining insight into how the world really worked, and he thought an editorial job on a serious magazine might be an excellent place to start. Not that he expected me to hire him so that he could continue his education: he had been reading high-brow journals since he was an undergraduate, and he thought that in time he could make a genuine contribution to this one. And then he offered an impressive critique of the magazine, showing a brilliant grasp of its strengths and weaknesses (touching on the latter with what I would call a tactful candor). I said I would get back to him, but the job, clearly, was his before he left my office. Only later in the afternoon did I realize that he never even asked about the salary.

As for me, I should say right off that I have very little interest in how the world really works. It's not that I wouldn't like to know, but the older I get the more complex life seems, and the less I hold out hope for anything like a unified vision of the world,

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let alone how it works. I began working here, in the same job I was now offering to Sanford Aronson, when I was twenty-four, close to 30 years ago. Although I had a chance to leave in the early 1980's to work for the *New York Times* in its "News of the Week in Review" section, I didn't go for it. This, I suppose, was the decisive move I never made—I've heard it said that everyone has one such move—though whether I would ever have climbed very high on the greasy pole at the *Times*, I cannot say.

I married young, and Charlene and I had three daughters. Today, all but the last, Rachael, now in medical school, are out and on their own. Charlene teaches special education in a public school in Kew Gardens, Queens; we live in an attached house in Flushing. What's left for me? Aside from the pleasure of practicing the craft of editing and enjoying the accomplishments of my three girls, I'm content to be astonished by whatever surprises life, and human nature, toss my way. Which brings me back to Sanford Aronson, or Sandy, as he asked to be called.

Small, fine-boned, with thin brown hair, Sandy gave an impression of extreme tidiness. Even at the end of the day in our dusty offices on 17th Street, he looked only recently emerged from a shower. He was also, I soon discovered, a very quick study. He turned out to have a deft hand at fixing poorly written manuscripts, and was particularly skilled at convincing their authors of the good sense of his (sometimes quite radical) changes. At editorial conferences he spoke little at first, yet always made points that needed to be taken seriously. Very early I began to sense that, before long, he would outgrow us and move on to greater things.

GENERALLY I don't socialize with my colleagues—no special reason, except that I much prefer an evening watching a movie on television at home to arguing about movies or, even worse, reviews of movies, in a room filled with people for whom altogether too much is at stake in the rightness of their opinions. But when we received an invitation to a dinner party marking the engagement of Sanford Joshua Aronson to Jennifer Daphne Kaiserman at her father's apartment on Park Avenue, I felt we ought to go. I knew that Sandy had been living—so far as I knew, living alone—in the West Village, and he had said nothing about having a girlfriend. But then at work we hardly ever talked about our private lives, and he certainly owed me no explanations. When I told him we planned to attend, he returned an odd, sheepish smile.

Sandy's prospective father-in-law Bernie Kaiser-

man was, I discovered, *the* Bernie Kaiserman. His specialty was buying and selling businesses—enormous businesses—and forming complicated combinations, spin-offs, and conglomerates. His first wife, I later learned, had died of breast cancer when Jennifer, an only child, was fourteen. After a too-quick second marriage to a very young woman, whom he bought off after less than a year, he was now married to an Argentinean, Jewish it was said, and clearly, from the photographs I had seen of the two of them in *Vanity Fair*, very high-maintenance.

He lived in a penthouse triplex formerly owned by Helena Rubinstein. In the elevator with us on the way up was another couple who introduced themselves as Sandy's parents, just in from St. Louis. A small man, bald, the father—"Call me Ira," he insisted—owned three dry-cleaning shops. Janet Aronson, who was wearing a mink jacket, didn't get a chance to say much before we were deposited at the Kaiserman penthouse and two young men in tuxedos took our coats. Ira Aronson patted the hair at the side of his head, straightened his tie, exhaled in a whistle, and, leaning toward me, said in a low voice, "I used to kid Sandy that you could also love a rich girl. But, Jesus, I never expected anything like this."

You didn't have to be from St. Louis to be impressed. The foyer led directly into a large parlor, along whose walls hung a vast number of 19th-century oils. I counted no fewer than six Renoirs and three Monets. I don't know enough about furniture to describe the contents of the room, but the effect was very French, suggesting a Louis of not too high numerals. More young men in tuxedos took our orders for drinks—ginger ale for the Aronsons—while others passed among us with silver trays laden with hors d'oeuvres.

"Ah, at last," said a man with powerfully curly black hair and very strong white teeth. He was deeply tanned and beautifully turned out. "The *mehutonim*," he said. "Bernie Kaiserman. Please, make yourself at home. *Mi casa su casa*." Kaiserman already had an arm around Mr. and Mrs. Aronson.

Ira introduced Charlene and me.

"My son-in-law's boss," Bernie said, holding out a hand. "A pleasure. Tell me, is the kid good at what he does, whatever the hell it is?" As we shook hands he firmly squeezed my elbow with his free hand.

"He's very good," I said. "Terrific, in fact."

"Funny he wanted to work for you. No insult intended, but I could have gotten him a job at one of Sy Newhouse's rags, or with Time Warner. But he wasn't interested. Independent kid, your son,"

Kaiserman said, turning back to the Aronsons. "How long you folks gonna be in town?"

Apart from Sandy and now his parents and father-in-law-to-be, we knew no one else at the party, though a number of the guests looked vaguely familiar. The apartment felt more like a museum than anyone's home. At one point, after Charlene deserted me for the washroom, I found myself in the dining room, its stark white walls covered with contemporary art. I am no expert, but I recognized paintings by de Kooning and Rothko, a Robert Motherwell, a Pollock, an Ad Reinhardt, and a large work in yellow and blue by Helen Frankenthaler. I was standing in front of it when Kaiserman approached.

"This *bazzerei* have any charm for you?"

"Some of it does," I said, "but I can't talk very well about the pleasure it gives."

"My wife gets more of a bang out of it than me. I don't know the first thing about it. A clever Russian named Sabarsky buys it for us. He tells me that, expensive as it now is, it's going to go even higher. If true, I'll have made my wife happy, earned a few bucks, and covered my walls, all in one shot. A good deal, no?"

Was this a winning absence of pretension, or coarseness to the highest power? I didn't have long to ponder the question.

"Let me ask you something," he continued. "My future son-in-law, what's your true opinion of him?"

"I told you, he's very good at what he does. He's smart and quick and first-rate at getting his point of view across."

"How tough is he is what I want to know."

"Tough?"

"I mean what's his endurance. How much crap can he take? Has he got any fist?"

"I'd like to help you, but I haven't known him long enough to say," I answered.

"You been around the kid a few months and you still can't tell? I can tell when I'm with a guy for half an hour. And I'll let you in on a little secret: tough is better than smart. Smart guys I can buy all day long, though I prefer to sell them. When I'm acquiring a company, if the head guy comes from somewhere like Wharton or Harvard, I'll almost always give him his walking papers."

A staccato click of high heels on the parquet floor announced the third Mrs. Kaiserman.

"Bernard," she said, pronouncing her husband's name in the English manner, with the accent on the first syllable, "our guests are waiting to hear from you in the drawing room."

Kaiserman introduced me as Sandy's employer.

"Hallo," she said, holding out two cold fingers

while looking over my shoulder. "You really mustn't delay any longer, darling."

"Right," he said as Felicia Kaiserman flamen-coed out of the room. "C'mon in, watch me play the great patriarch."

IN THE room with all the Renoirs and Monets, Kaiserman stood before an enormous marble fireplace. One of the waiters clinked on a wineglass for attention. The crowd, maybe a hundred people in all, gathered in a semicircle, champagne glasses in hand. I thought I recognized the actor Ricardo Montalban talking with an elderly woman whose nose could have opened a soup can.

"Jenny, Sanford," Kaiserman said. "C'mon up here, please." Jennifer Kaiserman was small and dark, a female version of her father, without the least trace of shyness as she stood with Bernie's arm around her, Sandy planted on his left.

"Friends, family, family-to-be," Kaiserman began, raising a fluted glass, "this beautiful young woman, my daughter, has brought me nothing but happiness from the get-go. Behind every successful man, the saying goes, there is a woman. In my case the woman is my daughter. My few accomplishments in this world owe more to Jenny than anyone will ever know. What I have built, I built with her and her children-to-come in mind. And tonight she brings me the most happiness of all by allowing me to announce her engagement to a brilliant young man. We're all going to hear fine things about Sandy in the future. So please join me in wishing them health and happiness and a glorious future."

As we all drank, I noticed Mrs. Kaiserman on the rim of our circle, talking energetically to an old dowager who, I later learned, was her mother. What had she been thinking when her husband declared his daughter's primacy in his life? What, I wondered, was the relationship between wife and daughter? If Felicia Kaiserman was a stepmother out of Hans Christian Andersen, the young Jennifer Kaiserman did not exactly seem like Snow White. I felt a rush of sympathy for my young associate, who suddenly appeared at my side with his fiancée.

"Michael," he said, "I'd like you to meet Jenny."

"And it's time you met my wife Charlene," I said, before proceeding to tell Jenny Kaiserman that I had found her father a most interesting man.

"Interesting?" she said, raising an eyebrow. "I'd say amazing. It's in the energy, you know. My father has this incredible energy. He sleeps about three hours a night. The rest of the time he's plot-

ting, don't ask me what." She laughed, showing small but perfect teeth.

"After you're married," I said, "don't be surprised if Sandy hits him up for money for the magazine."

"I'd be careful there," she said. "My father is likely to give you a large donation and then find some way to turn around and sell you out to Nabisco. Pretty soon you'll be turning out a house organ for cookies."

In the elevator going down, we once again found ourselves alone with the senior Aronsons.

"So, whaddya think?" Ira Aronson asked.

"Pretty impressive," I said.

"I told the kid he could also love a rich girl," he repeated himself. "But this is ridiculous. Typical of Sandy, an overachiever if ever there was one."

Janet Aronson kept her counsel.

THREE MONTHS later the wedding took place on the Long Island estate of Jay Gould. Everyone's unasked question was how much it cost. I counted three string quartets, a jazz ensemble, and two dance bands, one for old standards and the other for rock. An eight-course dinner was served to something like 500 guests, with a new wine for every course. Over the afternoon, Jenny appeared and reappeared in at least three different outfits. By the time a table-hopping Bernie Kaiserman made it over to where we were seated, it was fairly clear that he had quite forgotten who I was, which was fine with me.

Bridegroom and bride took a month-long honeymoon in Tuscany. Sandy had only two weeks' vacation time coming to him, and when I informed him that he would have to be docked for the other two weeks he pretended to look grave. From now on, there would be a not-so-vaguely comic aspect to any discussion of money with him. At the end of his first year—a difficult financial period for the magazine—I was able to give him a raise of only a thousand dollars. I considered apologizing for the low sum, especially in light of his stellar performance, but then I just decided to add the money—something on the order of \$28, after taxes—to his bi-weekly paycheck without mentioning the raise at all.

Sandy and Jenny were now living in her place on East 81st Street, off Madison, but as soon as Jenny became pregnant, they bought a house out of the city. When I asked Sandy where it was, he lowered his eyes and said, almost in a whisper, "Westport." I supplied the address to my friend Norm Brodsky, who lives in nearby Norwalk. "I know the street," he said. "It's waterfront. No houses under two mil-

lion." Returning from a visit to the Brodskys one Sunday afternoon, I made it a point to drive by, and it was a Tudor job of three stories, with an attached garage that held four cars and servants' quarters above, set on a lot of not less than an acre. Sandy's annual salary, it occurred to me, could not have come close to covering his real-estate taxes.

In the office, the only visible effects of Sandy's wealth were in his clothes. A careful dresser before, he was now—how to say it?—spruce in a quiet but moneyed way. I became a silent student of his shirts, which were made of wonderfully soft cottons and of such subtle blues and creamy whites as I'd not seen anywhere. One day, as he was leaving my office, I observed that his thinning hair had been neatly layered in the back.

But his work was as sharp as ever. He had begun writing most of our unsigned lead editorials, and he displayed a distinct knack for understanding and fairly stating rival points of view—and then demolishing them. I would read his flawless, concise arguments on the need for social justice, his calls for the redistribution of wealth, his attacks on unfettered market capitalism, and think of him going home to Westport to who knew what heights of luxury. And I would wonder, given his talents, the scope of his interests, the ease of his life, why hadn't he left, gone on to better things? What was he waiting for? Although he could have done my job as well as I did—who knows, probably better—he must have known that I wasn't planning to depart any time soon, though I did take advantage of a colleague's departure to promote Sandy into the job of managing editor (at a raise of all of two grand). I like to know the next man's ambitions, especially when he is working for me. But in Sandy Aronson's case, I really hadn't a clue.

AND CLUELESS I remained for the next five years, long enough for Jenny to have a second child and for Bernie Kaiserman to divorce his Argentinean wife and marry a Russian the same age as his daughter. Sandy had by now been working on the magazine longer than any of his less talented predecessors, and his salary had yet to hit the \$40,000 mark.

So one day when he invited me to join him for lunch—he was now working partly at home, and coming into the city only three days a week—I thought for certain that he was going to announce his long overdue departure. A new administration had taken office in Washington, and Sandy's father-in-law was a large enough contributor to both political parties to get him an interesting job at

State or possibly Defense, or even as a White House speechwriter.

I took a cab uptown to the Links, a small club on 62nd east of Madison. The staff wore green livery. A gray-haired black man led me into a small room toward the back with a single table, where Sandy was waiting, and took our drinks order.

"Look," Sandy said as soon as the man had left the room, "there are some things I have to tell you, and I wanted to do it in a very private way."

"You're leaving the magazine," I said. "I've been expecting it. I'm lucky to have had you this long."

"No," he said. "I'm not leaving, though I'm going to need a little more free time, at least for a while. My marriage is in serious trouble. It has been for years."

"I'm sorry," I said, not very helpfully. "Can it be fixed?"

"Don't see how," he said. "The trouble, to be embarrassingly specific about it, is that my wife sleeps around."

He paused as a waiter brought in two bowls of dark brown bean soup. "It wouldn't be so bad if she had a single lover," Sandy said when he'd gone, "but there've been a number of them. Just among those I know, there's a local tennis pro, two construction workers, a bartender at the country club in Westport, an airline pilot, and a former point guard for the Knicks—not a very distinguished clientele, I must say."

"With two small kids, how does she find the time?"

"The kids have a nanny. Jenny goes when and where she pleases. Money makes lots of things possible."

"Does she know you know?"

"Yes," he said, "I hadn't the self-control not to confront her with it."

"What did she say?"

"She says if I don't like it, why don't I leave? She's very calm about it. She says she'll be fine without me."

"Does her father know what's going on?"

"I assume he does, but I don't think he cares. He's always been a big player himself. Not exactly a rock of stability, my father-in-law. But I have to assume that, no matter what, he's going to be in his daughter's corner."

"What'll you do?"

"I wish I knew. I may need some time away from the magazine, which is one reason I'm telling you about this disaster."

"But you say this has been going on for a while."

"From nearly the beginning."

"You're too smart not to have considered why."

The waiter appeared with two elegantly presented trouts amandine, from each of which, with long-fingered precision, he extracted the bones. I had barely tasted my soup, which was delicious and which I was sorry to see taken away.

"I wish I could say the problem lies with me. For instance, that I have knotty sexual hang-ups. Sorry to report that in that department we've always seemed to do fine together."

"So what is the problem?"

"THE PROBLEM is that my wife has adopted the sexuality of a man—specifically, of a single man on the make. If she sees something interesting, she goes after it. Being a still attractive woman, her batting average is much higher than a man in a comparable condition. And of course the money makes it easy. She can try anything she likes and if she falls down, there's a soft golden net to catch her. She can't really lose, and she knows it."

"What about losing you?"

"I don't think she cares."

"And you?"

He inserted a small forkful of trout into his mouth and, after chewing briefly, said in the calmest possible voice, "I have come to despise her."

"So why not leave? Walk away?"

"The children. They're the most important thing in my life. I can't stand the idea of their being brought up by my wife, not to speak of their grandfather lurking in the background, no doubt up to wife number eight by the time they hit adolescence."

"What about a custody fight? Men win custody of their children all the time these days."

"Not against Bernie Kaiserman they wouldn't. With my father-in-law's money behind her, I haven't a chance. If he didn't kill me with sheer legal talent, he'd crush me with the cost of appeals. Michael, please forgive me for dragging you into this, but there's no one else I can talk to. I hate to think of myself as a whiner; it's bad enough thinking of myself as a cuckold. But I felt I had to unload, at least a little, and I'm afraid you're my victim. Sorry."

If Sandy was telling his troubles to me, he must have been lonely indeed. Of course, I could understand his not talking things over with his parents, or with his older sister, married to a dentist in San Francisco. Still, he and I had never shared any intimacies whatsoever, and his unloading, as he put it, suggested a deep friendlessness in the world.

"I may also need to call on you for a bit of help."

Would you mind if I brought the kids over every once in a while? Even though I'm living at home, I'm beginning to feel like a divorced father with visiting privileges who gets his kids for the weekend."

I told him I didn't mind in the least. We rode back to the office together, talking about an editorial he was writing on school vouchers. The finished piece, which he turned in later that afternoon, was 500 of the most polished, cogent words imaginable.

ANOTHER YEAR went by, in which Sandy did not allude even once to our conversation at the Links Club. Then one Sunday morning he called to say that his kids were with him and he was wondering if he could stop by for a half-hour. My wife nodded that it was fine, and I said we were looking forward to it.

From our living-room window I saw him drive up in a Mercedes SUV. His now six-year-old daughter was riding up front, his four-year-old son in a booster seat in the back. In the eight years I'd known him, I'd never seen Sandy in anything but suits, but today he was wearing tan pants, loafers, a black polo shirt, and a buttery soft suede jacket that looked as if it might cost two-months' salary. Walking up to our house, he had his daughter by the hand while carrying his son.

"Hey, Daddy," I said, "who are these beautiful children?"

"This elegant young woman is Caitlin, better known as Catey, or Catey-Bird," he said. "And this gent with his head on my shoulder is Turner, also called Teddy the Bear."

The girl had her father's coloring, fineness of features, and general tidiness of demeanor; the boy was pure Kaiserman, dark, compact, toothy. When I held out my arms to take him from his father, he squirmed in my hands like a ferret or some other small animal that was all muscle. I set him down, and my wife suggested that both children go with her into the kitchen for cookies.

"Thank you, Charlene," Sandy said. "I need a word or two in private with Michael."

I dropped onto the couch; he took a chair on the other side of the coffee table, removing two envelopes from an inner pocket of his jacket and handing them to me.

"One," he answered my unspoken question, "is the editorial on the privatization of Social Security—surprise, we come out strongly against it. The other, I'm sorry to say, is my resignation."

"I'm even sorrier," I said. "Where're you head-

ed? Whoever you're going to be working for is damned fortunate."

"I won't be working, at least not for a while. Where I'm going is to ground. You know that phrase from the old English detective books?"

"It means hiding out, no?"

"It means precisely that."

"What's going on?"

"Jenny wants a divorce. She's found another man. She also wants the children. I've decided not to let her have them. I'm taking them with me."

"Where to?"

"I'd rather not say. Their grandfather is certain to come after me, and it's probably better that you not know."

"I'm sure you've thought this through."

"I've thought about almost nothing else for the past four years."

"You have money?"

"I've been on an allowance of ten grand a month—walking-around money, my father-in-law calls it—since my wedding day, and I've stowed away quite a lot over the years. I've decided to consider it alimony and child support. Money won't be a problem for a while."

"What about the children's mother? Won't they miss her?"

"Probably at first. But I hope they'll get over her."

"Won't she miss *them*?"

"That's unclear. But it's her father I worry about."

"He loves them so much?"

"No, he hates to lose so much—at anything."

Sandy got up, and we walked into the kitchen. At the table Charlene was reading to the children, the boy in her lap.

"We've got to be on our way, kids. Say thanks for the treats."

I walked Sandy to the car and stood while he strapped in his son and set the seat belt around his daughter. We shook hands, and I told him I thought him a remarkable man, adding that if he needed me for anything—anything at all—he had only to call. In the living room, I read his editorial: seamless, beautifully argued, not a word in need of changing.

IT WAS only eight days later that one of our interns buzzed to announce a Mr. Bernard Kaiserman waiting to see me. I suppressed the impulse to respond that I couldn't possibly make time for him without an appointment.

Walking into my office, with its metal desk and shabby furniture, Kaiserman looked around, as if appraising the joint before proposing to acquire it.

"I heard you're looking for a new managing editor," he said, taking the seat across from my desk without being invited to do so.

"Are you applying? The pay is low, but the benefits are decent."

"I'm not looking for a job but a son-in-law who's stolen my grandchildren. I wonder if maybe you could help me here."

"How so?"

"When did you last see him?"

"A week ago Friday," I said, lying, "here in the office, when he handed me his resignation."

"Did he say where he was headed?"

"He only said that he wanted some time to consider his options."

"No mention that one of his options was taking my grandchildren?"

"None."

"I see," said Kaiserman, studying my face. "What he's done is called kidnapping, for which he could spend the rest of his life in jail. I suppose, too, that people who withhold information would be considered accessories after the goddamn fact. Have I got that right? I may be a little rusty on my legal phrases. Anyhow, we're talking pretty serious business here. I'm also offering a personal reward of a quarter of a million for any information leading to the discovery of these kids. That have any interest for you?"

Prison and riches, a stick and a carrot, in the same paragraph. It was interesting, watching a real operator at work.

"For business reasons, I'm hesitant to go to the police with this. It wouldn't play well in the press. It might also give some other schmuck the idea of stealing my wife's Afghan hound."

"I wish I could help you," I said, "but Sandy never said a thing to me about his plans. I gathered that his marriage wasn't all he hoped for, but I really had no idea it would force him to this."

"Something wrong with him, my son-in-law. I think I sensed it from the first. Low energy. Thin blood. Lives too much in his head. Who knows?"

"How is your daughter taking it?"

"She was planning to divorce him anyway. But right now she's a nervous wreck over her kids."

"You don't think he'd do anything to hurt them, do you? He's not violent or crazy."

"I'm not so sure about the crazy part. Doesn't he know who he's fooling with?"

"My guess is that he probably does," I said. "He's never underestimated you, as far as I could tell. He always thought of you as a very formidable character."

"He'll know how formidable when I catch up with him." With this he rose, took a business card out of his wallet and placed it on my desk. "Call me if he gets in touch," he said. "I'll make it worth your while."

I walked Kaiserman through the office and into the corridor, waiting with him until the elevator arrived. Back at my desk, I couldn't work. I kept thinking of Sandy and his two children, driving off in who knew what direction or into which sunset. "Drive, kid," I found myself chanting. "Drive. Don't stop. Don't let the son of a bitch catch you."

LIFE GOES ON. Two new managing editors came and quickly went. From time to time I would read an item about Bernie Kaiserman in the business section of the *Times*, buying or selling some mammoth enterprise, but otherwise I was shut out from news. Had Sandy gotten away, or had he been quietly apprehended by his father-in-law's private detectives? Was Jenny remarried, with a new set of children? And where was Sandy now? In jail? Remarried? Still on the run?

Until one day, almost four years after his visit to our house, sorting through the morning mail, I came upon a postcard with a scene of mountains capped by snow and clouds, postmarked from a western Canadian province. The message, in a bold printed hand, read:

Dear Michael,

Kids fine. Things go decently. As Confucius neglected to say, Man who marry rich girl earn every damn penny.

The card was unsigned.

OBSERVATIONS

Mourning Without Meaning

Michael J. Lewis

ANYONE WHO followed the ceremonies marking the anniversary of September 11 would have been struck by the exceptional dignity of the coverage. In every medium—from television networks to major newspapers to newsweeklies—there prevailed a tone of sober and respectful solemnity that for the most part refused to cloy or to pander. In media that have long sought to put themselves on a congenial first-name basis with their audience, and have contributed mightily to the pervasive informality of modern life, this was a welcome return to reticence.

The tone was most conspicuous on television, which has also been the worst offender—and was the medium through which most Americans experienced last year's attacks. This is not to say that the networks turned overnight into models of self-effacement. Competition by means of relentless product differ-

entiation remained the order of the day, complete with titles, logos, musical themes, and other devices essential to brand-name recognition. If Fox Network gave us *The Day America Changed*, on MSNBC the spare caption 9.11.1 transformed itself into 9.11.2 to the ominous accompaniment of string music.

Since the Gulf war, such bits of graphic and sonic cleverness have been part and parcel of the coverage of major news stories, and an unavoidable artifact of around-the-clock news. But as if to compensate for the unseemly assigning of musical themes, however subdued, to episodes of human agony, there was at least a moratorium on commercial advertising during most of the commemorative broadcasts, and by most advertisers throughout the day.

Despite all the documentaries and retrospectives already aired over the course of last year, some of the coverage was also surprisingly fresh. An episode of *60 Minutes II* on CBS stood out, a terse and moving account of the day of the attacks as experienced by President Bush—tracing his peregrinations from the first

whispered reports during his visit to a kindergarten class in Florida to the endless, halting odyssey back to the White House that afternoon. By a happy stroke, the President was interviewed on board Air Force One; this gave his account an unusual vividness, as when he gestured through the window where he first glimpsed the belated arrival of his fighter protection, dispatched after an erroneous warning that he had been targeted by a rogue plane. The image of this airborne command center, adrift in the fog of war and barraged by contradictory and panicked reports, brought one jarringly close to the essential solitude of command.

In producing such forensic accounts, including first-rate documentaries on the construction and collapse of the Twin Towers shown on the History Channel and the Learning Channel, television rose to the occasion. Apart from an occasional lapse (like the Learning Channel's *Inside Flight 93*, a hastily written effort that failed to take the true measure of that heartrending, passenger-led uprising), the quality was generally high. And this was

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also true of the print media. Especially notable was "Towering Ambition," which appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* on September 14 and drew a brilliant set of connections between the financial and technical decisions that shaped the towers and the precise chain of physical events that toppled them.

Here, as almost everywhere in the media coverage since September 11, one could hardly complain about what was there. The problem lay in what was not there. For all the microscopic analysis of melting girders and terrorist funding networks, a troubling void remained at the center of the coverage—and thus, given the pervasive nature of electronic communication, at the center of the collective national experience.

THE MAIN event of the week was the cycle of ceremonies at the three battlegrounds of attack. They were strikingly different. At Shanksville, Pennsylvania—a site that is poignantly random, the fortuitous endpoint of the airborne struggle aboard United Airlines flight 93—there was no institution to give the proceedings an organized character. Instead, the surviving relatives of the dead, along with their small-town hosts, gathered in what had the feel of a family service. Still, through memories of the heroic final stand of the passengers, we were given glimpses of a group of remarkable citizen-soldiers, perhaps the first important ones since the Revolutionary War itself. Of all the ceremonies, this one offered the most solace, as well as the greatest degree of realism about the what and the why of September 11.

At the Pentagon ceremony, too, it was possible to view the attacks less as a series of cold-blooded but essentially incomprehensible massacres of innocents and more as vicious acts of war—in which, as occasionally happens in the tumult of war, the headquarters became the front line. It was this perception, in-

deed, that had given a bracing solidarity to the Pentagon's repair effort over the previous twelve months; its "hard-hat patriots" completed their work within the year and without conspicuous hand-wringing over the defiling of consecrated ground. Even the question of an appropriate memorial had been resolved with military efficiency: the anniversary marked the due date for proposals for a modest monument, to which the public had been invited to contribute.

But of course it was the proceedings in New York that formed the real focus of the day. Unlike in Washington, there was no speechifying, the only formal addresses being the readings that opened and closed the ceremony: the Gettysburg Address read by New York Governor George Pataki and the Declaration of Independence by New Jersey Governor James McGreevey. Otherwise, the ceremony was movingly laconic, consisting of a recitation of the names of the dead by a variety of family members, politicians, and celebrities, among whom former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani fittingly came first. The background was a quiet musical dirge in which the cellist Yo-Yo Ma assisted.

Four times the roster of the dead was interrupted by a moment of silence, marking the precise instants when the towers were struck and when they fell. The simple litany of names achieved its effect not by means of elevated language but through its inexorable rhythm, as in those itemized inventories of goods or casualties that interrupt the narrative flow of the *Iliad*. Through the two interlocking rhythms, the toll of names and the larger structure of the silences, the proceedings took on something of the formal order of a requiem.

Indeed, the vocabulary of religious observance pervaded the entire array of gestures on display in New York: the lighting of candles, the tolling of bells, the clasping of hands, the standing in reverential si-

lence. Here was a national version of funeral rites, carried out on the largest scale and experienced collectively through the medium of television. And the fact that religious gestures should have marked this occasion, even in our secularized public life, is understandable, for there is no alternative. Or rather the only alternative, the culture of commercial entertainment that has come to dominate our public life, has nothing useful to say in the face of human tragedy.

IN ONE aspect, however, the three ceremonies and their countless counterparts throughout America differed fundamentally from a religious service: they could offer little consolation to the *living*. The rites and rituals of the world's great religions provide a set of measured and incremental steps by which the business of grieving gives way to the business of life. Human feeling—of the most agonized sort—is an accompaniment to this process, to be addressed with kindness and sympathy; but it is not the primary object.

Our modern public rites, by contrast, pivot about our feelings, and tend mainly to ratify them. They are conducted in such a way as to promote and encourage emotionality rather than to restore a sense of divine or cosmic—or national—order. In this sense, our bout of grieving has been therapeutic rather than spiritual in character. And like therapy it must be repeated to be effective, which perhaps accounts for the waves of improvised and largely identical ceremonies that have been held over the past twelve months.

It has become a commonplace to contrast the response to the September 11 attacks with the response to the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, whose first anniversary was noted, if at all, only in order to renew a fierce sense of national resolve. At that time, the negatives of grief and loss were viewed in their rela-

tion to positives—that is, action and purpose. Death in general was seen as pointless or meaningful, tragic or heroic, depending on its relation to larger things.

Clearly, we now have a very different sense of what it means for a nation to grieve. And that different sense has to do with our loss of those same “larger things,” which have become a subject of great embarrassment to enlightened American opinion in the intervening years. Patriotism, sacrifice, democracy, idealism—for many college-educated Americans of a certain age, these are mawkish shams. Rather than uniting us, they divide us. The great debunking of the cardinal American ideals over the last decades has left us little on which to agree, especially when it comes to war. That may be one reason why so much importance attaches to mourning, one of the very few exceptions and, it seems, always and everywhere a proper response to meaningful public events.

The Vietnam war produced no uplifting monument to mark the flawed but noble idealism of that enterprise. But it did call forth a great unifying memorial: Maya Lin’s 1982 black marble wall and gash in the earth, the first crystallization of a new form of public ceremony from which all hint of moral uplift had been banished. Her bleak and somber wall remains moving, but it set an example with pernicious consequences. Thus, while there was no formal attempt to memorialize the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of America, and certainly nothing on the grand and stirring scale of the Chicago Columbian Exposition a century earlier, the date *was* marked by self-abasing gestures of regret and repentance on the part of educators, intellectuals, and public officials alike.

By the 1990’s, it seemed that mourning itself had come to take the place of patriotism. Nowhere was this more egregiously on display than during the presidency of Bill

Clinton, whose alacrity in seeking out sites of tragedy and disaster deservedly earned him the sobriquet of mourner-in-chief. And nowhere was the Clintonian influence more vivid than in the dirge-like but ultimately evasive character of the New York services on September 11. Instead of providing a positive charge to the living—a peroration—the ceremony at Ground Zero left it to the spectators to puzzle out the connection between the recent attacks on their country and other situations in which the nation had been put in peril.

The very decision to recite the Gettysburg Address indicated just how nervous politicians were about saying anything that might be deemed “divisive.” And yet, aside from the fact that Lincoln’s great address deals with the consecration of a battlefield as a national cemetery, in no other respect was it appropriate to our present circumstances. The soldiers who fell at Gettysburg were fighting in a war whose aims had been articulated with great eloquence on both sides, and which they clearly understood. Those who fell in the World Trade Center were not soldiers but civilians, and most could not have known in their final private moments why they were dying. If the ceremonies in New York sought to do anything, they ought to have articulated those reasons. To invoke Lincoln’s sublime rhetoric instead of making a statement about today’s war, and about radical Islam, may have been understandable, but it was also an act of dishonesty.

THE ELEVATION of collective mourning over collective purpose accounts for another aspect of this past year: the extraordinary solicitude and reverence shown to the bereaved. Inevitably, this has led to muscle-flexing by some of the politically empowered mourners. Survivors’ groups were given a prominent voice in the decision-making process both for the commemoration

of September 11 and for the reshaping of Ground Zero. In the latter case, the results have not been happy.

While the jagged hole in the Pentagon is no longer visible, even a schematic program for rebuilding Ground Zero remains to be finalized. In large measure this is due to the recalcitrance of survivors’ and victims’ groups, many of whom would prefer that the entire site be made over into a great park, a necropolis upon what was the cradle and apex of American capitalism. And so the fate of the site, especially the “hallowed ground” of the buildings’ footprints, is as uncertain as it was last April when the first tentative moves toward rebuilding were announced. It will be grotesque if the bereaved are allowed to exercise a veto over the reuse of the site—a veto, in effect, of the dead over the living.

It may be because of this same deference to the bereaved as a single undifferentiated class that more has not been made of Todd Beamer, Tom Burnett, and Jeremy Glick, the heroes of flight 93, whose names deserve to be as universally known as those of Jimmy Doolittle or Sergeant York in wars past. These men took actions that they knew would result in their certain death, and they did so in the most American way imaginable, by holding a *vote* on whether to make their fatal charge. Here, for once, Americans did literally what the final verse of the *Star Spangled Banner* calls for: “when free men shall stand between their loved homes and the war’s desolation.”

But such heroism assumes its meaning only in the context of defending the nation, and here the media, and many ordinary Americans, turn squeamish. In place of a collective national identity, cemented by shared political and cultural ideals, we have been told that the real bond among us is our variegated heterogeneity, the diversity that is “our strength.” In place of the na-

tion-state, we have the “gorgeous mosaic.”

It was to the great chagrin of this viewpoint that the attacks of last year fell not on the mosaic but on the nation-state. Of course, a jury-rigged explanation was promptly provided. The real object of attack, it was said, was our openness and tolerance—in short, our diversity. But considerable verbal sleight-of-hand is required to keep such a gross fiction aloft. Hence the euphemisms that have surrounded the attacks, characterized neutrally as “tragic events” rather than as a massacre or an act of war. Hence, too, the taboo that fell on the depiction of the most horrific images from the World Trade Center—people leaping voluntarily to their deaths in preference to being burned alive.

In one of these, a man and woman are said to hold hands as they plummet together, but I have not seen it. Nor am I likely to. Within a day of the attacks, there arose a popular outcry against the showing of such images, whose numbers are legion. And the media, normally keen to justify their own sensationalism by invoking the public’s right to know, have deferred to this day.

As a result, we have been left with a peculiarly sanitized version of the event which gives us only the colossal fireball and the slow-motion implosion of the buildings, making *their* destruction the subject. As in an action film, with its lurid explosions and computer-generated special effects, one is comfortably detached from the human dramas taking place within.

Whether intentional or not, the tendency of this self-censorship is clear; those things that cause us to weep will be shown, those that might prompt rage or justifiable anger will not be. Indeed, the one serious attempt by an artist to grapple with the unspeakable horror of the atrocities emerged, as if by unerring instinct, as the opposite of an image of atrocity. This was *Tumbling Woman*, a bronze sculpture by Eric Fischl, which depicts a single nude woman, upside-down and legs drawn forward, at the precise instant when her head meets the ground. Fischl deftly manages to convey every aspect of these gruesome deaths except the moral (let alone the physical) universe in which they occurred. Even so, his statue, installed at Rockefeller Cen-

ter during the week of remembrances, was removed after a near-universal outcry. *

THE VIOLENT attacks of last year occurred on television, and it is on television that America, one year later, sought catharsis. But ceremonies alone, however noble and touching, will not set right what has gone wrong. Without a sense of purpose, we are left to grieve alone, fumbling our way to an internal resolution that will not come. Until we can fit our grief into the larger scheme of things, we weep in an existential void.

* The reluctance on the part of artists to do anything smacking of patriotism, let alone jingoism, is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the past, such varied names as Winslow Homer, Frederick Church, Thomas Hart Benton, and Norman Rockwell happily worked to mobilize the public in times of war. But for at least a generation, explicit political activism among artists has been the province of the Left, and the task of rallying national resolve has fallen by default to those stalwart reflectors of populist sentiment, country music and tabloid cartoons. See, for example, the songs of Charlie Daniels (“The Last Fallen Hero”) and Toby Keith (“Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue”) and the wickedly inventive cartoons of Sean Delonas of the *New York Post*.

MUSIC

Moral (and Musical) Equivalence

Terry Teachout

UNTIL RECENTLY, the avant-garde British artist Damien Hirst was best known in this country for his participation in *Sensation*, the notorious 1999 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in which he displayed a “sculpture” consisting of the carcass of a pig, sawed in half and immersed in a formaldehyde-filled tank. But on September 10, 2002, Hirst staked a new claim to notoriety by claiming on a BBC broadcast that the destruction of the World Trade Center by Arab terrorists had been “visually stunning” and “kind of an artwork in its own right.” He went on to say:

You’ve got to hand it to them on some level, because they’ve achieved something which nobody would have thought possible, especially to a country as big as America. So on one level they need congratulating, which a lot of people shy away

from, which is a very dangerous thing.

Within a few days, Hirst “apologized unreservedly” for his remarks, claiming:

As a human being and artist living in the civilized world, I value human life above all else and abhor all acts of terrorism and murder. . . . I in no way condone terrorism of any kind, and I deeply regret any offense caused by the misrepresentation of my thoughts and feelings.

Significantly, Hirst had nothing more to say about the less widely reported part of his original statement, in which he declared that it would be wrong for the U.S. and Great Britain to engage in military action to prevent further attacks: “The surest way to make it happen again is to go and start throwing stones at somebody.”

Still, what may be most interesting about the Hirst episode is not that a British artist gave voice to sentiments like these but that they have not been widely echoed in the U.S. Here, artists as a group have been surprisingly cautious in their

public responses to September 11, despite the likelihood that a large percentage of them would at one time have agreed with much of what Hirst said.¹ Many, perhaps most American artists hew to a more or less pacifist line, and are sufficiently alienated from traditional American values that they might easily have sympathized with the notion that “a country as big as America” somehow deserved to suffer the events of September 2001. In addition, many avant-garde artists habitually aestheticize events in the real world, however horrific, and would presumably be inclined to sympathize with Hirst’s homicide-as-art “interpretation” of the assault on the World Trade Center.

WHY THERE should be such uncharacteristic reticence on the part of a community that normally hastens to offer its unsolicited views on any and all subjects is itself an interesting question. It may be partly explained by the fact that large-scale works of art are not created

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¹ For a summary and analysis of initial responses to September 11 by American artists, see my article, “Prime-Time Patriotism” (COMMENTARY, November 2001).

overnight. Though various public works intended to commemorate the events of last September have been commissioned from well-known American artists, it is only recently that any have been performed or put on display. Among the first was *On the Transmigration of Souls*, a 25-minute-long choral cantata by John Adams, jointly commissioned by Lincoln Center and the New York Philharmonic and premiered in September by Lorin Maazel, the Philharmonic's new music director.

Along with Philip Glass and Steve Reich, Adams is closely identified with the minimalist style of postmodern classical composition, which makes use of simple, highly repetitive harmonic patterns. Writing in the *New York Times*, John Rockwell has called Adams "possibly the most successful and widely respected American composer of his generation." Yet out of the high emotions of that dread day, he has succeeded only in spinning a piece memorable chiefly for its sheer unmemorability.

The first sound heard at the performance of *On the Transmigration of Souls* was that of a prerecorded tape on which the names of victims were spoken by friends and family members. Then the orchestra entered quietly, laying down a thickly scored carpet of slowly shifting harmonies over which the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and the New York Choral Artists sang phrases drawn from the missing-persons signs that could be seen throughout lower Manhattan a year ago. The words were as uncomplicated, even naive, as the harmonies that accompanied them: "He was the apple of my father's eye." "Love you to the moon and back, forever."

A first-rate composer might have fused these humble materials into something compelling, even overwhelming. What Adams produced, by contrast, was more like a minimalist film score—all background, no foreground. The most striking

parts were borrowed from better pieces by better composers, specifically Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (the source of the shimmering tritones sung by the children's chorus) and Charles Ives's *The Unanswered Question* (on which the offstage trumpet solo and a chorale-like string passage were based). And while music need not be original to be stirring, *On the Transmigration of Souls* was not only derivative but strangely passive in its overall effect. Even though it contains two loud episodes that were presumably intended to be climactic, one came away from the premiere feeling no catharsis, no sense of resolution or release.

To some extent, the failure of *On the Transmigration of Souls* can be blamed on the inherent limitations of Adams's musical language, which is both harmonically uneventful and almost entirely unmelodic. He uses the building blocks of functional tonality—the triad-based chords eschewed by atonal and serial composers—without arranging them according to the rules of large-scale structural logic that give tonal music its characteristic feeling of forward motion.

True, Adams's avowed purpose in writing *On the Transmigration of Souls* was to create what he calls a "memory space," a static, cathedral-like sound environment in which the listener would be free to meditate at will on the deaths of the victims of September 11. Other composers have used similarly restricted technical means to broadly similar ends; one thinks of Igor Stravinsky in such works as the finale of *Symphony of Psalms* and the spare, deliberately repetitive chorale in memory of Claude Debussy that concludes his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. Yet these pieces, despite their austerity and economy of means, are nonetheless emotionally involving in a way that *On the Transmigration of Souls* is not.

Is THE difference simply that Adams is a less interesting composer than Stravinsky? Largely—but not, I think, entirely. For another peculiar

aspect of *On the Transmigration of Souls* is what one might call the ethical neutrality of its content.

The text, for instance, is both fragmentary to the point of incoherence and mostly inaudible in performance, meaning that the piece supplies the listener with no intelligible verbal information about the nature of the shocking events it seeks to evoke. Nor does it commit itself to any *opinion* about those events. We hear recorded voices intoning the names of the victims; we hear choristers singing the words of their loved ones. That is all. Nowhere does Adams suggest that the tragedy he is commemorating was an act of war willfully perpetrated against innocent, unsuspecting civilians, or that some of the victims went to their deaths not passively but heroically.

It is worth recalling in this connection that *On the Transmigration of Souls* is not the first work by John Adams to deal with the topic of Arab terrorism. He is also the composer of *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991, libretto by Alice Goodman), an opera about the 1985 murder of Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound Jew, by a band of PLO terrorists who hijacked the *Achille Lauro*, the cruise ship on which he was sailing. Unlike *On the Transmigration of Souls*, which received respectful reviews, *The Death of Klinghoffer* was hugely controversial, mainly on account of its supposedly "nonjudgmental" portrayal of the terrorists. But as Samuel Lipman wrote in COMMENTARY eleven years ago:

Where *Klinghoffer* is concerned, the pretense of not taking sides, of "even-handedness," is just that—a pretense. For in treating the murder of Klinghoffer as a "death," and in viewing the incident through the lens of moral equivalence, the opera for all practical purposes endorses the claims of the Palestinian assassins.²

² "The Second Death of Leon Klinghoffer" (November 1991).

One might reasonably wonder why a New York orchestra should have chosen the composer of so morally obtuse an opera to write a piece in memory of the victims of September 11.³ But, given that precedent, no one should have been surprised by the score that Adams delivered. It is significant that he took great care in his public statements about *On the Transmigration of Souls* to say nothing that could be construed as having political implications. It is no less significant that the piece itself says nothing about September 11 other than it was a tragedy—as if the victims Adams claims to be honoring had been killed by a natural disaster, like an earthquake, rather than by the deliberate efforts of despicable men.

This is not to suggest that the New York Philharmonic, or the citizens of New York, would have been better served by a blatant exercise in explicit musical sermonizing. Nevertheless, a work of public art occasioned by the mass murder of 3,000 Americans might logically be expected to embody all sorts of strong emotions—fear, anguish, outrage, consolation, resolve. The only “emotion” conveyed by *On the Transmigration of Souls* is the stunned, uncomprehending confusion that a nihilist might feel upon witnessing a monstrous act of evil. It is, in short, an almost perfect postmodern requiem, expressing neither faith nor hope nor love, but merely uncertainty.

ENTIRELY BY coincidence, it was immediately after the premiere of *On the Transmigration of Souls* that I read *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society*,⁴ a book of dialogues between Daniel Barenboim, the Jewish conductor and pianist who is music director of the Chicago Symphony and the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, and Edward W. Said, the Arab-American academic who in recent years has become better known to the public at large as a publicist for the

radical Palestinian cause. These dialogues took place some time prior to September 11, to which the book makes no reference. Yet its relevance to that occasion—and to the premiere of *On the Transmigration of Souls*—is evident.

In addition to his work as a literary scholar and political commentator, Said is a serious amateur pianist who writes frequently on musical matters. He and Barenboim are the co-founders of the West-Eastern Divan Workshop, which features an orchestra consisting of Arab and Israeli musicians playing side by side. Barenboim, a former resident of Israel who has made numerous public statements sharply critical of that beleaguered country, and in particular of the government of Ariel Sharon, has also engaged in other quasi-political activities that have made him a much-disliked figure there. Among other things, he has gone out of his way to play for Palestinian audiences in the West Bank on several occasions, most recently in Ramallah on the eve of the first anniversary of September 11, and last year he ostentatiously flouted the informal Israeli ban on live performances of the music of Richard Wagner by conducting an unrequested, unannounced Wagner encore at Jerusalem's Israel Festival.

A reader of *Parallels and Paradoxes* who knew nothing about Barenboim or Said might well come away from the book supposing them to be nothing more than a pair of civilized cosmopolitans whose political views are shared by all similarly civilized persons. As Said remarks at one point on the subject of ethnic identity:

[T]here's the need to say, “Yes, there's this identity,” especially if you're a German or an Arab or a Jew or an American, and then to say, “Yes, it's not only different, it's also better.” I mean, it's the built-in logic of the bloody thing. Therefore, the humanistic mission has to be able to maintain difference but without the dom-

ination and bellicosity that normally accompany affirmations of identity.

One would scarcely gather from these sweetly reasonable words that Said is a political hard-liner who let himself be photographed hurling stones at Israel Defense Force soldiers, or that he recently joined forces with the likes of Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal, and the convicted murderer Mumia Abu-Jamal to sign a newspaper ad urging Americans to “RESIST the war and repression that has been loosed on the world by the Bush administration. It is unjust, immoral, and illegitimate. . . . The brutal repercussions have been felt from the Philippines to Palestine, where Israeli tanks and bulldozers have left a terrible trail of death and destruction.” (The ad described the carnage of September 11 as similar to “scenes in Baghdad, Panama City, and, a generation ago, Vietnam.”)

Even so, there are moments in *Parallels and Paradoxes* when it is possible to make out the real Middle East through the smothering cloud of urbanity. In describing the founding of the West-Eastern Divan, for instance, Said mentions in passing that “it was not surprising that, at least in some Arab countries, there was a question of whether the governments would allow the students to attend,” though of course he says nothing about the obvious implications of that remark. (To create the illusion of moral equivalence between Israel and the Arab world, it is necessary to suppress countless facts that everyone knows but no one cares to mention out loud.) Two pages later, he tells another, equally revealing story:

There was an Israeli cellist in the audience who was also a soldier,

³ The Boston Symphony, which had been scheduled to perform excerpts from *The Death of Klinghoffer* last September, cancelled those performances immediately after September 11.

⁴ Pantheon, 186 pp., \$24.00.

and he was having trouble speaking in English, so Daniel asked him to speak in Hebrew. He more or less said, "I'm here to play music. I'm really not interested in all the other stuff that you guys are trying to push on us in these discussions about culture. I'm here to play music and I'm not interested in anything else and I feel very uncomfortable because, who knows, I might be sent to Lebanon and I'll have to fight some of these people." Daniel told him, "If you feel that uncomfortable, why don't you leave? Nobody's forcing you to stay." And he ended up staying.

It would be interesting to know exactly what this unnamed Israeli cellist-soldier said, rather than taking Said's paraphrase at face value. For that matter, it would be interesting to know what has happened in his life since he returned to Israel—but of course he does not reappear in *Parallels and Paradoxes*, any more than the other intractable problems of the Middle East are engaged by Said or Barenboim on a level deeper than that of evasive chit-chat.

EDWARD SAID is an intellectual thug who poses as a thoughtful, troubled citizen of the world while simultaneously serving as an apologist for Arab terrorism. He is also, as Stanley Kurtz has pointed out, a ruthless academic enforcer who makes every effort to silence those scholars who dare publicly to disagree with him.⁵ Still, one must give him credit for being a serious man, passionately committed to the Palestinian cause and prepared to support it by any means necessary.

Not so Daniel Barenboim, who

is nothing more than yet another preening example of the Artist as Politician, emitting gaseous nonsense about the healing power of music without having the faintest notion of what is at stake in the war against Arab terrorism:

[T]he fact remains that if conflicts are one day to be solved, they are only going to be solved by contact between the warring parties. . . . I believe that in cultural matters—with literature and, even better, with music, because it doesn't have to do with explicit ideas—if we foster this kind of a contact, it can only help people feel nearer to each other, and this is all.

It may be that Barenboim has never troubled himself to read some of the more lethal things that Edward Said has had to say about Israel; it may be that he has read them and does not care. It says much about *him*, at any rate, that he considers Said to be "the one friend with whom I can share so many things, a soulmate." Such fawning, too, is nothing new; the world has always been full of artists who delight in publicly playing with "explicit ideas" without taking the trouble to understand them.

IT CANNOT be said often enough that great art is never political. But artists, be they major or minor, live of necessity in the world of politics, and when they choose of their own free will to participate in the public affairs of that world, they can and must be held to the same standards of accountability as all others who do the same. John Adams and Daniel Barenboim may not be great artists, but they are certainly ac-

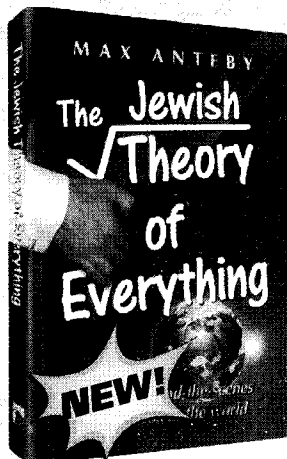
complished craftsmen whose work, whatever its limitations, has nothing in common with the fraudulent foolishness of a Damien Hirst. Yet they are at one with Hirst in their chronic refusal to distinguish between victims and villains, most of all when, as in the present instance, the victims in question happen to be Americans or Jews.

This is, in general, an affliction often found among those whom the art critic Clement Greenberg once described as "art-silly." Only an art-silly fool would describe September 11 as "kind of an artwork in its own right," or commemorate it by composing a piece like *On the Transmigration of Souls*, or suppose that playing the "Moonlight" Sonata in Ramallah—or, for that matter, *Die Walküre* in Jerusalem—would under present circumstances have any effect other than giving comfort to the sworn enemies of the civilization that made Beethoven and Wagner possible.

That relatively few such individuals have been heard from in the past year has been an unexpected relief for lovers of art who cringe at the irresponsibility of gifted but politically ignorant artists holding forth on matters about which they know nothing. Alas, there can be no doubt that countless numbers of such artists, in America and elsewhere, are awaiting the moment when, like Adams, Barenboim, and Hirst, they too will once again feel free to make mischief for those defending Western culture from the villains who long to destroy it.

⁵ "Balancing the Academy," *National Review Online*, September 23, 2002. See also "'My Beautiful Old House' and Other Fabrications by Edward Said" by Justus Reid Weiner in COMMENTARY, September 1999.

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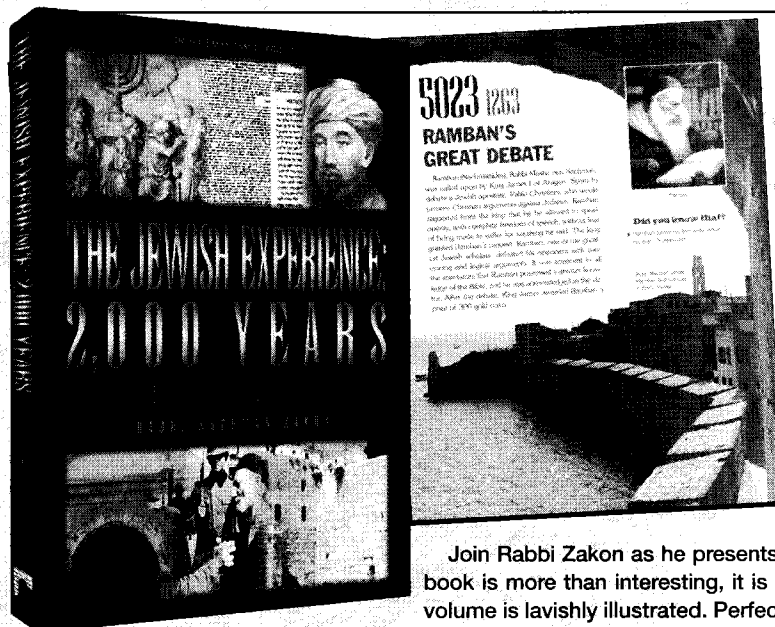
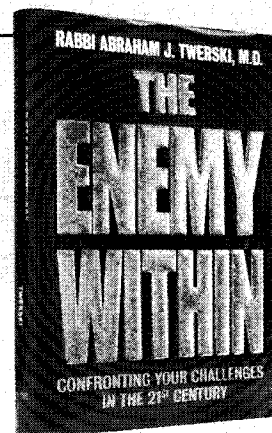
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Books in Review

Smashing the Idols

The Prophets:
Who They Were,
What They Are
by Norman Podhoretz

Free Press. 390 pp. \$30.00

Reviewed by
Hillel Halkin

NORMAN PODHORETZ, whose eminence as a literary, cultural, and political critic hardly needs reviewing for readers of COMMENTARY, has many feathers in his cap, but biblical scholarship is not one of them. After reading his powerfully argued new book on the prophets, one is thankful for this. No biblical scholar could have written anything so eloquently and passionately polemical, or so unclogged

HILLEL HALKIN is the author most recently of *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel* (Houghton Mifflin). His many articles in COMMENTARY include "Can the Bible Be Trusted?" (July-August 1999) and "Genesis and the Talking Heads" (February 1997).

by the "maybe's," "if's," and "on the other hand's" of academic discourse. This does not mean that *The Prophets*, which frequently cites the conclusions of scholars, never makes fine scholarly distinctions. But it is more concerned with making the big and important distinctions that should matter to us all.

Podhoretz has written this book to denounce what he regards as a basic distortion of the message of the biblical prophets—a distortion that is historically ancient and that determines how millions of people read the prophets or (since they are more talked about than read) conceive of them to this day. Four major influences have converged in this approach. In order of both their historical appearance and their historical impact they are: 1) classical Christianity; 2) modern, "liberal" Christianity; 3) Reform Judaism; and 4) 19th- and 20th-century "progressive" politics, especially in its Jewish guise. Although he tends for convenience's sake to lump its different outlooks together and address them as a single point of view, Podhoretz has in effect penned an attack on the traditional Christian

negation of Judaism, on political liberalism, and on Jewish adherence to left-wing causes, all in one. These are old targets of his; yet his criticism is now accompanied by a moral urgency and vision that—so he clearly feels—is that of the prophets themselves.

WHAT IS the nature of this distortion? In a discussion of the 8th-century B.C.E. book of Amos, who was chronologically the first of the "later prophets," the *nevi'im aharonim* of Hebrew tradition, Podhoretz defines it as the belief in a

path-breaking change supposedly inaugurated [at this time] . . . from a primitive emphasis on ritual (especially animal sacrifice, but also the observance of festivals, or even the singing and playing of hymns of praise to God) to a higher and nobler stress on morality; from a narrowly tribalistic mentality to an all-embracing universalist outlook (or, in the more standard parlance, from "particularism" to "universalism").

In this conception, prophets like Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah,

Ezekiel, and the “First” and “Second” Isaiah represent a transition from a lower to a higher stage of Israelite monotheism, one in which God is elevated from the patron of one small people to the caring Father of all mankind and in which doing good to one’s fellow man supplants the fetishistic observance of the Mosaic commandments as God’s principal demand. Seen thus, the Hebrew Bible is an evolutionary document of which the later prophetic books are the most sublime and humanly advanced.

It is against this view of biblical religion, which is of course opposed to the traditional Jewish interpretation of Scripture, that Podhoretz has written this book. Basing himself on numerous close textual readings of both the *nevi'im aharonim* and the “early prophets” (a category including such figures as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha), he repeatedly hammers away at several points.

The first of these points is that, contrary to the “evolutionary” take on the Bible, the God of the early prophets is as radically monotheistic, and as concerned with the entirety of the human race, as is the God of the later prophets. Already in the case of Abraham, Podhoretz writes, we encounter

the revolutionary and previously unimaginable idea that there is only one God, not many gods; that He is invisible; that He alone created the heavens and the earth and all they contain or embrace; and that, for reasons He does not disclose, He has chosen to make the seed of Abraham . . . the instrument through which His law and His commandments will be revealed first to them and then in due course to all other peoples as well.

And already in the laws of Moses, the argument continues, the moral commandments regulating behavior between man and man are as important as the ritual commandments regulating behavior between man and God.

The common denominator joining Abraham to Moses, Podhoretz writes, is a supreme purpose that is neither strictly moral nor strictly ritual: namely, the extirpation of idolatry. Indeed, only the extirpation of idolatry, in the biblical conception of things, can subsume both religious ritual and human morality under a single rubric, since only by realizing that “all the other gods worshiped by everyone else in the world are nothing but inanimate images of wood or stone or gold fashioned by men” can men be prevented from worshiping their own handiwork and ultimately, forsaking the imperatives of both ritual and morality, their own selves.

PART TWO of Podhoretz’s book, its main section, moves on to the later prophets. Devoting a separate chapter to each of the major ones, he reiterates the theme of the biblical battle against idolatry while coming at it from the opposite direction. For if, with the early prophets, he has sought to demonstrate that this battle committed its participants to a universal moral view of human relationships no less than to the ritual particulars of Mosaic law, he now seeks to show that, for the later prophets, Israel’s ritual service of God remained as important as human morality.

This is a more difficult task, because it runs up against many of the later prophets’ own declarations, which are also among their best-known. “Ye who turn judgment to wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth,” says Amos,

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies; though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offering of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

And here is First Isaiah, the great visionary of swords beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning-hooks:

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees . . . to turn aside the needy from judgment and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey and that they may rob the fatherless.

And elsewhere:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. . . . Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when you make many prayers I will not hear.

It is upon passages like these that the early church fathers based their reading of the prophets as precursors of the Christian casting-off of Jewish “legalism” for the gospel of altruistic love. It is in them, too, that modern Jewish commentators have found the biblical justification for abandoning Judaism’s commitment to halakha, the “mere tradition of the deed” as it was called by the Reform thinker Leo Baeck, in favor of what Baeck termed “Judaism’s emphasis on moral doing.” To this day, the later prophets are commonly cited by rabbis, ministers, and college valedictorians in support of the view that—the quotation is from Micah—“What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.”

But, Podhoretz contends, what the later prophets insist the Lord really requires is the exact same thing required by Him according to the early prophets—that is, “the war against idolatry . . . which again, contrary to the stereotyped interpretation [of the prophetic books of the Bible], embraces *both* ritual and morality.” It is here that Podhoretz’s literary skills at teasing out a text are

most impressive. He writes, for instance, about Micah:

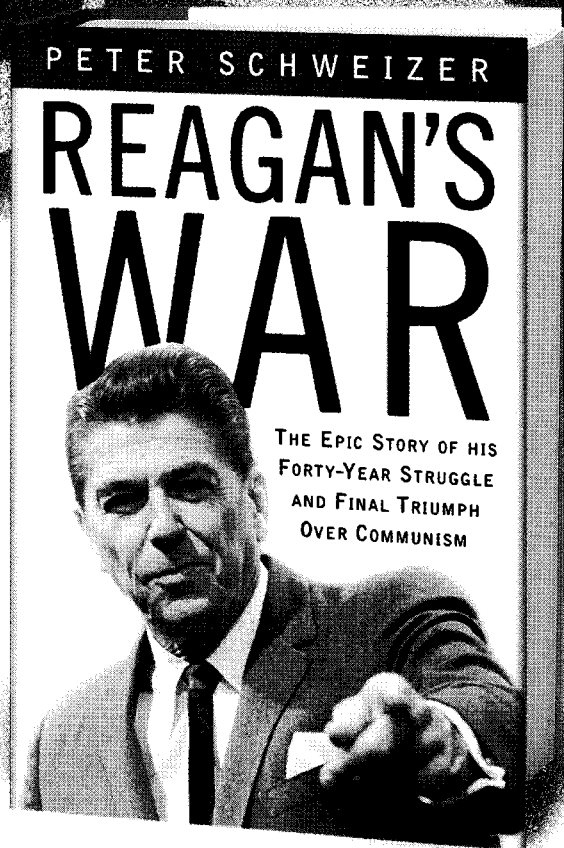
Micah provides us with [a] . . . powerful piece of evidence . . . that he is fusing social sin with idolatry. . . . It comes in a verse containing the bill of indictment that God finally issues after . . . telling the people what they should have known already about justice and mercy—having, He says, been told before. In this highly significant verse, it is a Northern dynasty [of Israel] that is brought in as an epitome of everything wicked that is being imitated by the Southern Kingdom [of Judah, to which Micah was speaking]: “For the statues of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels. . . .”

Because this verse is preceded by a list of social injustices, a number of commentators (both Jewish and Christian) have interpreted it as referring not to the royal patronage of Baal worship during the reigns of Omri and his son Ahab, husband of Jezebel, but rather to “oppression and injustice” or “to the luxury of the upper classes, and social injustice.”

Yet these commentators miss a crucial element, which is that the house of Ahab embodied a perfect synthesis of idolatry and social oppression. It was during this king’s reign that, we recall, Elijah treated the two classes of sin as equally serious, first by slaughtering 450 prophets of Baal after his contest with them on Mount Carmel, and then by cursing Ahab and Jezebel with a bloody end for the murder of Naboth and the theft of his vineyard.

The underlying premise of Elijah’s twin actions, I would contend again, was that the theft and the murder flowed from the idolatry, or conversely that they were the fruits of faithlessness to the commandments of the God of Israel. In harking back to “the

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house of Ahab," . . . Micah the literary artist returns to the bloody crossroads where sins against God meet and marry crimes against man, and the two classes of violation become indistinguishable from each other.

This is a subtle point. In the minds of the prophets, Podhoretz is saying, immorality cannot be divorced from idolatry because the moment one ceases to believe that morality is the absolute will of God—just as, in the Bible, are animal sacrifice and numerous other rituals—it becomes the relative judgment of men, and the transformation of "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not steal" to "It is generally speaking in the interest of society not to kill or steal" opens the gates (since society's interests can always be redefined) to legitimized murder and theft. Podhoretz's Micah is the literary ancestor of Dostoevsky, whose Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* becomes a thief and a murderer as a logical consequence of losing his religious faith.

Podhoretz understands the other later prophets in the same way that he understands Micah. Although repelled by the ritual worship of God when it is insincere or polluted by idol worship, they are never opposed to it in itself. On the contrary: they cannot imagine an ideal future without it. Here is Jeremiah:

And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the Lord . . . then shall there . . . come [people] from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise unto the house of the Lord.

And if this is true of the later prophets' attitude toward Mosaic

ritual, it is even truer, Podhoretz maintains, of their attitude toward God's choice of Israel, without which such ritual makes no sense. This point is made most extensively in a chapter on the Second Isaiah, generally considered the most "universalistic" of all the prophets. Repeatedly Podhoretz cites chapter and verse to show that the Second Isaiah, too, fully accepts the specialness of Israel. "Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken, ye people from afar," Isaiah's God calls out, reaching out to the Gentiles as the God of the Bible has never done before—yet in the same breath the prophet adds in His name: "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." Podhoretz summarizes:

[T]he universalism of the Second Isaiah falls well within the bounds of the tradition of classical prophecy: it is a universalism arrived at through particularity. . . .

Each of the prophets, in his own way . . . comes . . . to elucidate over and over the ramifications of the revolutionary idea that there is only one true God ruling over the world; to remind the people of Israel that His inexplicable choice of them carries with it special demands and responsibilities; and to explain how fulfilling these demands and responsibilities will ultimately bring all other peoples to acknowledge His sovereignty over them as well. . . .

In this formulation, we see clearly how the "scandal of particularity" loses all touch of the scandalous in a proper conception of the relation between chosenness and universality. To wit: that even though God decided to reveal the Law to Israel and through Israel, He does not intend it for Israel alone. Nor is the ability to follow the Law confined to Israel alone: it is a power that resides in all human beings.

IS PODHORETZ right in his main contentions? I believe he is. Do these

have relevance for a contemporary society that is not a Bible-reading one? Podhoretz believes they do. This brings us to the third and last section of his book, entitled "The Prophets and Us."

At first glance, this section, although the shortest of the book's three, strikes one as its most diffuse. In it, Podhoretz wanders from one brief discussion to another—of biblical commentators, the mysticism of William Blake, the literary criticism of Lionel Trilling, George Orwell and the nature of utopianism, the idea of the afterlife, modern Zionism, modern science, multiculturalism, environmentalism, feminism, Palestinian and Muslim terror, the relativistic and ultimately "pagan" nature of our times—and pulls us engagingly after him while we wonder just where he is heading. But in the end he lets us know:

[H]aving surveyed the manifestations of pagan thought and practice in the contemporary world, I want now to peer at that world as the classical prophets did at theirs—through the lens of idolatry—in order to bring certain sectors of the picture more sharply into focus. . . .

[I wish to advance] the proposition that idolatry is rampant in America today. . . .

It would be hard to disagree that money and power and celebrity and status are of great importance to Americans. . . . But it was not the desire for, or the possession of, things of this nature that the classical prophets were excoriating when they denounced idolatry. . . . [The] astonishing idea [of the prophets was] that the makers of idols become indistinguishable from the idols they have made. . . .

My thesis, in short, is that to the classical prophets idolatry amounted to self-deification, the delusion that we humans could become ". . . as gods" . . . and if I am right about the classical

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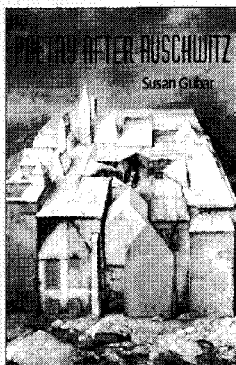
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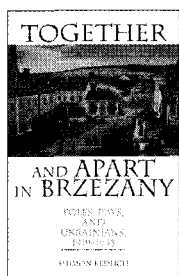
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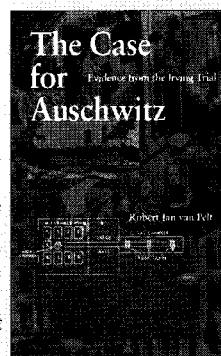
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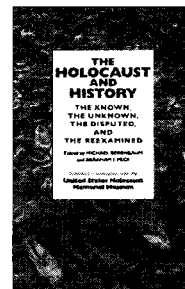
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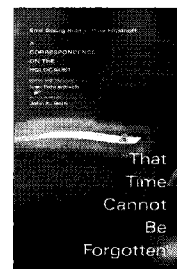
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prophets, they are telling us that idolatry is the cult of self. . . . It is here that we finally and definitively come to the true idol of the American tribe: not Money or Power or Celebrity or Status, but Self. . . .

If, as the classical prophets assumed, we are all now living the only life we will ever have, there is no need to belabor the abiding and overriding importance of what they have to say about the idolatry of self and how it deprives us of the chance or the ability to live that life to the full. . . .

Now, as then, the battle will have to be fought first and foremost within ourselves and then in the world of ideas around us. And now as then, it will have to be conducted in the spirit in which the classical prophets themselves conducted it, and in which we are commanded by the book of Deuteronomy to love the Lord our God: with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our might.

And those among us for whom God does not exist? I presume to suggest that even, or indeed especially, they are called upon to answer the summons to battle sounded by the ancient prophetic trumpet of Israel. Because unless we all commit ourselves to the struggle for our own civilization, it will, like Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah 2,500 years ago, wind up being sacked from within by the insidious anti-nomian workings of the new paganism, and it will then become vulnerable to sacking from without.

THIS TOO is an "astonishing idea," this notion that the prophets might have the most to say to those who do *not* believe in their or indeed in any God. It seems to contradict everything Podhoretz has been telling us so far about the prophets' unshakable conviction that faith in the God of Israel alone can ensure right behavior in this world. To those for

whom God does not exist, must not man become the measure of all things? And if he does, how is he to avoid the self-deification that is considered not only by Podhoretz but already by Dostoevsky in the 1860's and 70's to be the great horror of our post-religious age?

Podhoretz appears to be implying that even if one does not call it God, there is somewhere a measure beyond measure—inner voice or outer necessity—that the prophets can help teach us to obey. On top of everything else he has taught us in this vastly illuminating book, one would give much to know more about what he thinks this is.

Bane of the Booboisie

The Skeptic:
A Life of H.L. Mencken
by Terry Teachout

HarperCollins. 496 pp. \$29.95

Reviewed by
John Gross

HL. MENCKEN's historical significance is beyond dispute. As the scourge of the American "booboisie"—a target pursued relentlessly in his voluminous newspaper columns and in the six collected volumes of his journalism, *Prejudices* (1919-27)—he has a permanent place in the mythology of the 1920's. As the champion (for a time) of significant new writing both at the *Smart Set* and then as editor of the *American Mercury* (1925-1933), and as a prime disrupter of the Genteel Tradition, he

JOHN GROSS is the former editor of the *London Times Literary Supplement* and now the theater critic of the *Sunday Telegraph*. His recent books include the memoir *A Double Thread* (Ivan Dee) and, among other edited volumes, *After Shakespeare: An Anthology* (Oxford).

helped to institute a major revolution in literary taste. In *The American Language* (first edition 1919), he made a lasting contribution to philology, and in three volumes of memoirs, *Happy Days* (1940), *Newspaper Days* (1941), and *Heathen Days* (1943), he proved himself a master of autobiography.

Walter Lippmann, writing in 1926, called Mencken "the most powerful influence on this whole generation of educated people." For Edmund Wilson, he was "without question, since Poe, our greatest practicing literary journalist." Both of these tributes are quoted by Terry Teachout in the course of his admirable new biography, and he has no trouble producing others equally resonant. Teachout (who needs no introduction to readers of COMMENTARY) also cites Richard Posner's recent survey of references to "public intellectuals" on the web between 1995 and 2000. In terms of overall number of mentions, Mencken ranks an impressive thirty-seventh; among deceased intellectuals (he died in 1956), he comes in sixth—behind Timothy Leary, it must be said, but ahead of such luminaries as Thomas Mann, W.H. Auden, John Maynard Keynes, and Albert Camus. The Sage of Baltimore is still news.

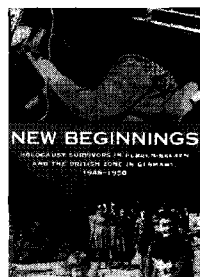
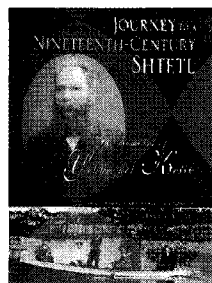
Some of it is bad news. The publication of Mencken's diaries in 1989 created a furor. Three decades after his death, it emerged that his private attitudes had often been much nastier than his public utterances. In particular (though he was not short of prejudices in other directions as well), he stood revealed as unquestionably anti-Semitic. The appearance of two previously unknown memoirs in 1993 and 1994 left an even more disagreeable taste; you cannot help wondering how many of those Internet mentions in the years that followed turned on the question of his bigotry.

Fortunately, Mencken remains a living force for worthier reasons—

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though not quite on the terms he himself would have wished. He was greatly impressed by his own prowess as a thinker. When he dipped into his work, he wrote, he was "struck by the number of ideas that still seem more or less valid and significant today. I have thrown off, in my time, an enormous number of such ideas—possibly more than any other American writer of my time."

The boast was not entirely unfounded. At his best, Mencken abounds in intelligent *observations*. But "ideas," except in the most colloquial sense, seems too grand a word for them. He was certainly not a systematic thinker, he seldom felt the need to think through the consequences of the positions he took, and Teachout leaves you keenly aware of his contradictions.

His iconoclasm, we are shown, went hand in hand with a no less instinctive conservatism. (On one level, as Teachout writes, he remained "the Baltimore burgher who reveled in tradition, preferably German.") He contrived to be both a nihilist who maintained that the world was a meaningless spectacle and a fer-

vent believer in the gospel of Science. And he never abandoned the conviction, first acquired when he was a young man working in the newsroom of the *Baltimore Herald*, that life is an incessant struggle for survival. Teachout calls this his "social Darwinsim in shirtsleeves."

It is not the ideas themselves that make him worth reading, then, but the wit and pungency with which they are expressed. Nor is it the generalizations that count for most in his work, well-turned though they usually are, but the specific cases or characters (which, nine times out of ten, means the specific targets) he discusses. He survives primarily as a master stylist, and as a comic writer of rare power.

WHAT IS called for, in the biography of such a man, is a rounded personal portrait rather than an intellectual one, and this is what Teachout provides. His book gives you, to a striking degree, the *feel* of Mencken, including a strong sense of what his physical presence must have been like. There is an excellent account of the Baltimore milieu

where he was born in 1880 and in which he grew up, and of the extent to which it both was and was not German. As one would expect from this biographer, Mencken's love of music is delineated with an expert hand. His wife Sara, whose death after less than five years of marriage left him devastated, is vividly brought to life. So is the one woman with whom he had been seriously involved before her, the more independent-minded Marion Bloom. (It is an odd coincidence that she should have shared her name with one of the most famous characters in 20th-century fiction, Molly Bloom, who as Joyceans will recall was also christened "Marion.")

As he builds up his portrait, Teachout displays a sharp eye for the revealing anecdote and the telling quotation. You certainly feel you know Mencken better when you read, first, what one of his closest colleagues on the *Baltimore Sun*, Hamilton Owens, had to say about him—"never was a man more gregarious, never one who strove more generously to keep his friendships green"—and then see

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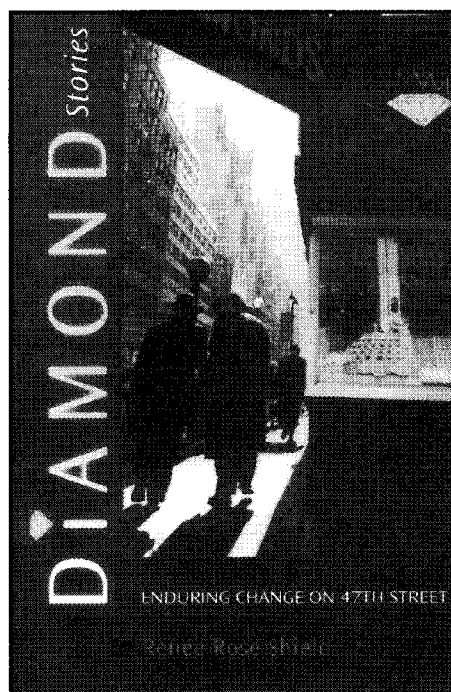
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what Mencken had to say about Owens in his diary: "a time server with no more principle in him than a privy rat."

There are some fine set-pieces, too. The best of them, which Teachout places right at the start of the book, is a dramatic confrontation that took place at the Gridiron Club dinner in Washington in 1934. Mencken, who was a guest speaker, followed Gridiron tradition by assailing the presidential guest of honor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, but kept his comments fairly mild. Wily FDR, who had bathed Mencken in smiles before the speeches began, responded with a blistering denunciation of American journalists—a speech that turned out to be something Mencken himself had written seven or eight years earlier.

Mencken maintained his composure—at the end of the dinner he shook Roosevelt's hand and said, "Fair shooting"—and when he got back to Baltimore tried to laugh off the episode. But it marked the end of what had been, by Menckenesque standards, a honeymoon with Roosevelt in his press comments, and the beginning of a notoriously bitter campaign against the President that never let up.

In retrospect, this episode has also acquired symbolic significance, which is why Teachout gives it the prominence he does. It suggests the prestige that had accrued to Mencken as a public commentator during the 1920's; and it shows him at the point at which his popularity—and his authority—were about to decline. But the minor detail is no less arresting. On arriving at his hotel before the dinner, for instance, Mencken found that he had forgotten to bring a dress shirt. He borrowed one from a colleague, then cut himself while shaving and failed to notice that his shirtfront was spattered with blood. Luckily his colleague alerted him, and he was able to send out and buy another shirt just in time. Nerves? Anxiety about his wife, who was ill? What-



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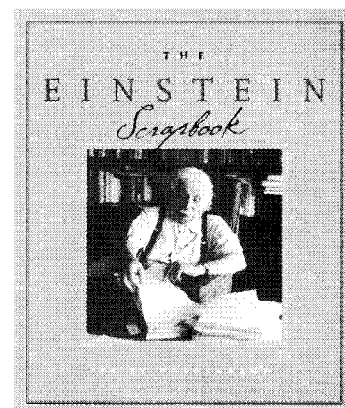
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ever the reason, reading about the incident makes him the more real.

To ANYONE who knows Mencken only from his work, some aspects of the figure Teachout portrays are bound to come as a surprise. The gap between the style and the man was often a wide one. In his writing,

Mencken seems bold and worldly: it could be easy to conclude that he was a recklessly beer-quaffing bohemian. In life, however, he was a very cautious person, a great hypochondriac, and a mother's boy: he lived with his mother until she died (he was forty-five at the time) and did not get married until five years later.

Where the man was prodigious was in the amount of work he got through, and in the verve he brought to it. Here, for the most part, Teachout makes a first-rate guide. It would be hard to improve on his account of Mencken's career in journalism in general, both as a writer and as an editor. But when it comes to one department, literary criticism, he can be somewhat less rewarding.

Part of the trouble may be that Teachout does not seem particularly engaged by the literature of Mencken's period. He is casually dismissive, for example, of the excellent William Dean Howells, cheerfully bracketing the author of *A Modern Instance* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* with such forgotten mediocrities as Gene Stratton Porter and Harold Bell Wright. (This is an echo of Mencken himself at his most cavalier.)

At the same time, Teachout shows little enthusiasm for many of Mencken's favorites, with Theodore Dreiser arousing his particular distaste. He makes a great deal of the notion that, in championing Dreiser early in his career, Mencken was operating from largely opportunistic motives: the young critic was giving his own reputation a boost by associating himself with a rising star. There is something to this, as Mencken himself conceded. But it seems unlikely that Teachout would be so taken with this interpretation if he himself felt the impact of Dreiser's power.

Where he shows a much surer touch is in the emphasis he puts on Mencken's admiration for *Huckleberry Finn*. He also does justice, within the limits of space, to that hefty and constantly enlarged masterpiece, *The American Language*. Here you are reminded that, however much Mencken may have lampooned *homo boobus Americanus*, his own prose owed an enormous debt to the vitality of the American vernacular.

As for the brutalities, Teachout puts in a plea of mitigation where

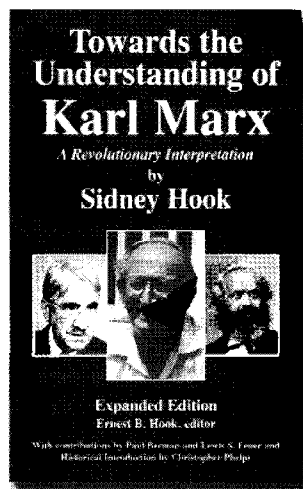
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he can, but he certainly does not attempt to tone them down. On the contrary, he takes care to give us some samples of the Sage of Baltimore at his worst, full in the face. Mencken's refusal to lament the fallen of World War II, for example: "Anyone silly enough to believe in such transparent quacks as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill leaves the world little the loser by departing from it." That is a sentence that manages to get things wrong in about seven different ways, all of them vile.

Yet while it would be hard to forget Mencken's offenses even if we wanted to, we should be big enough to set them aside most of the time—long enough, at least, to give ourselves a chance to appreciate his lasting virtues. He remains a difficult case, but in addition to telling a very good story very engagingly, Terry Teachout's book makes it much easier for us to achieve a balanced judgment.

The Leaker

Secrets:
A Memoir of Vietnam
and the Pentagon Papers
by Daniel Ellsberg
Viking. 480 pp. \$29.95

Reviewed by
Jacob Heilbrunn

OF THE members of the American foreign-policy establishment who disowned the Vietnam war, Daniel Ellsberg was the most unusual and perhaps also the most influential. A bureaucratic adviser but never a high-profile official, he shot to prominence in 1971 for leaking the classified "Pentagon Papers," a

JACOB HEILBRUNN is a member of the editorial board of the Los Angeles Times.

7,000-page government study of American involvement in Vietnam that created a sensation when it appeared in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

In *Papers on the War* (1972), a book he wrote immediately after his role in the exposé became public, Ellsberg set out the grounds of his opposition to America's involvement

in Vietnam, but he did not provide much in the way of a personal reckoning. Thirty years later, in *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, he seeks to fill that gap, providing both an insider's view of policy-making during the war and an account of his own unlikely odyssey from ardent anti-Communist to hero of the radical Left.

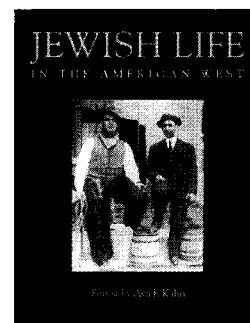
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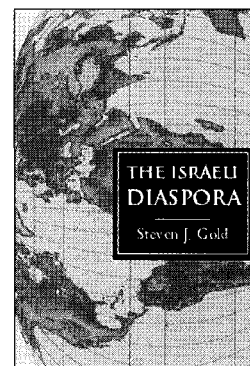


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BORN IN Chicago in 1931, Ellsberg had become a cold-war liberal by his late teens, admiring Harry Truman's willingness to stand up to Soviet aggression. "As I followed the news . . . about the [1948] Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, the Stalinist regimes and political trials in Russia and Eastern Europe," he writes, "I came gradually to accept all the cold-war premises and attitudes." A gifted student, Ellsberg graduated from Harvard, where he studied economics, and then took a one-year fellowship at Cambridge University. Hoping to fight in the Korean war, he came home to join the Marines, only to have the war end before he could see action.

In 1956, Ellsberg returned to Harvard, quickly earning a Ph.D. in game theory, a field of mathematics dealing with questions of strategy. Convinced that nuclear deterrence

could be understood better—and strengthened—by the precise modeling of potential conflicts, Ellsberg soon found a home at the RAND Corporation, the government-affiliated think tank that was then the center of such work.

Harry Rowen, a deputy assistant secretary of defense in the Kennedy administration, was impressed enough with Ellsberg's work at RAND to bring the young analyst to Washington as an adviser during the Cuban missile crisis. Three years later, in 1964, John T. McNaughton, another senior Pentagon official, invited Ellsberg to be his special assistant, his "alter ego." Jumping at the chance to leave behind his quiet research, Ellsberg threw himself into his prime duty: screening all the information available on Vietnam and deciding what McNaughton should see—and what others should not

see. He had assumed a key role, he writes, in "an apparatus of secrecy . . . that permitted the President to arrive at and execute a secret foreign policy."

Even at this early stage, Ellsberg was not convinced that the U.S. could win the war, but he dutifully followed the policies laid down by his superiors. At the request of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, he collected material on atrocities being committed by the Communist Vietcong (VC) forces controlled by North Vietnam that President Johnson could use to bolster public support for the bombing campaign he initiated in March 1965. "Before long," Ellsberg writes, "I had more statistics and vivid details of VC atrocities in my files and even in my head than almost anyone else around, which colored my thinking about the war, to some degree permanently."

For all his interest in game theory and high strategy, Ellsberg hankered to get into the field. In Washington, he met General Edward Lansdale, a legendary counterinsurgency figure who had been appointed by Johnson to work with the South Vietnamese government. Ellsberg joined his team and explored the country for two years, traveling by jeep to some of the most remote and dangerous areas. What he saw disgusted him: a corrupt and incompetent South Vietnamese military, and American troops utterly lacking discipline and training.

THOUGH HE now viewed the war as hopeless, Ellsberg was still an insider, and hoped to persuade his higher-ups in the foreign-policy establishment that it was futile to continue fighting. To that end, he returned to RAND and began working with Pentagon officials Morton Halperin and Leslie Gelb on an analysis, commissioned by McNamara, of the decisions that had led to the Vietnam morass.

Sifting through the material that would become the Pentagon Pa-

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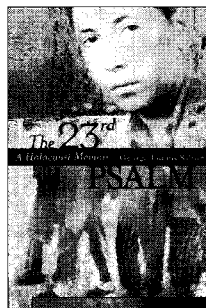
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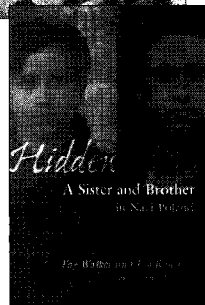
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pers, Ellsberg had a crisis of conscience. He came to believe that Vietnam was not an accident, but rather the logical culmination of American cold-war imperialism. Though every President from Truman on down had had abundant information showing that a war was unwinnable, after the defeat and departure of the French in the mid-1950's each had persisted in deepening the American presence. As he saw it, an obsession with anti-Communism and military power had infected the presidency.

Having observed the heated public debate that followed the leak by one Pentagon official of a forthcoming request for more troops, Ellsberg decided that *he* might be able to stop the war altogether by releasing classified materials. In his words:

[I]t was as if clouds had suddenly opened. I realized something crucial: that the President's ability to escalate, his entire strategy throughout the war, had depended on secrecy and lying and thus on his ability to deter unauthorized disclosures—truth-telling—by officials.

One source of Ellsberg's readiness to divulge such information, he acknowledges, was his own growing involvement with the antiwar movement. By 1969, even as he worked on the Pentagon Papers, Ellsberg found himself attending a conference at Haverford College of War Resisters' International. By 1971, he was leading something of a double life. He recounts one particularly jarring day in which, after getting tear-gassed at an antiwar demonstration in downtown Washington, he hopped to the Council on Foreign Relations to hear McGeorge Bundy, who had been Lyndon Johnson's assistant for national security, retrospectively defend the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. As Ellsberg writes, "It was a surreal experience, after a morning of mobile tactics on

Fourteenth Street, to be sitting in a room surrounded by my fellow war criminals, listening to [Bundy] tell lies about the war." Given these views, the surprising thing is not that he released the Pentagon Papers, but that he did not do so even sooner.

To HEAR Daniel Ellsberg tell it, the release of the Pentagon Papers was a decisive victory for American democracy. But he grossly exaggerates their significance. Though they contained documents that have proved valuable to historians, they hardly conveyed one singular stark truth about the Vietnam war. Like every other sort of historical material, they were subject to interpretation and dispute. Nor did they contain much information that was really new at the time.

The Pentagon Papers generated controversy because they had been composed in secret, and revealed government officials saying one thing publicly and another privately. But there was nothing especially remarkable in this, either: officials have always shaded the reality behind foreign-policy decisions. The notion that this pointed to a deliberate conspiracy was nonsense. Officials of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations were hardly wrong to view the Vietcong as a dangerous force. Ellsberg may now believe that his own view of the Vietcong was unfortunately "colored"—that is, distorted—by the atrocities they committed, but the coloration, as a series of Presidents and the American people themselves recognized, was of the essence of Communism in theory and practice.

What this memoir does make plain is that Ellsberg liked playing to two galleries at once, reveling in his insider status at the Pentagon while seeking the approbation of the antiwar movement and its Left-liberal sympathizers in the media. He was hardly alone among the foreign-policy elite in believing that the

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U.S., not Soviet and Communist expansionism, had become the bad guy on the international scene; indeed, long before our disastrous rout from Saigon and our abandonment of our South Vietnamese allies to their fate, the idea that anti-Communism had crippled Ameri-

can foreign policy had become the governing nostrum of the Democratic party. Ellsberg simply went further than most, trading the worthy tradition of cold-war liberalism for the chic radicalism of his own day. Thirty years on, the truth still eludes him.

Her Own Woman

**An Unlikely Conservative:
The Transformation of
an Ex-Liberal**
by Linda Chavez

Basic. 255 pp. \$26.00

Reviewed by
Dan Seligman

IN 1970, the Ford Foundation identified Linda Chavez—then a financially strapped graduate student with a husband (himself in graduate school) and a two-year-old child—as a finalist in a fellowship competition for minority students and flew her to New York for the decisive interview. The fellowship would have let her complete her Ph.D. without working. What Chavez feared, as she sat in the waiting room, was disqualification because of her poor math scores on the Graduate Record Exam. It had not occurred to her that she might be disqualified because her scores were too *high*. But they were, and she was rejected. What the bureaucrats at the Ford Foundation wanted, it turned out, was another kind of Hispanic: one who was darker-skinned, “educationally disadvantaged,” did not speak English so well, and in general showed no signs of assimilating into the broader culture.

This moment and others like it in Chavez’s immensely readable new memoir do much to explain her steady drift away from liberalism and her eventual embrace of the conservative movement. Chavez’s public career has now spanned twenty years—a Nexis search brings up her name in 219 articles in the *New York Times* over that period—and has landed her in a wide range of interesting jobs, in almost all of which she has managed to be controversial.

LINDA CHAVEZ grew up in Albuquerque and Denver in a household

DAN SELIGMAN is a contributing editor of *Forbes*.

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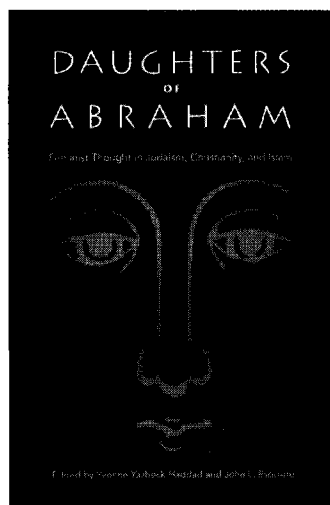
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that was recurrently mired in grinding poverty, and with parents whose lives, thanks in large part to her father's alcoholism, were endlessly chaotic. Neither parent was well educated or thought much of schooling. But despite the disarray in their own lives, both seem to have been instinctive social conservatives. They had very strict ideas about how a young Catholic girl should behave; and when Linda's father was around, there was hell to pay if she returned late from a school dance. She attended Mass every Sunday and dutifully watched Monsignor Fulton Sheen on television.

Things changed abruptly in Chavez's post-high-school years, when the dominant influence in her life was a young man named Chris Gersten. As he announced on their first date, he was an atheist, a leftist, and an active member of the Young

People's Socialist League—which also meant he was a fervent anti-Communist. Gersten persuaded her to join him as a student at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and they were soon planning to marry.

Chavez's subsequent revolt against liberal politics took place over several decades, and had several different motifs. One major theme was her dispiriting experience with affirmative action. Like her husband, she had been a fervent supporter of the civil-rights legislation of the 1960's, and while still an undergraduate at Colorado she volunteered to help find candidates for a new program called United Mexican-American Students. UMAS ended up meeting its quota of 150 students by abandoning all academic standards, in effect taking anyone who applied. The university was clueless about how to handle these

new Mexican-American enrollees, who, at constant risk of flunking out, became increasingly alienated, radicalized, and zonked out on drugs.

By the time Chavez left Boulder in 1970, she was persuaded that this effort at "outreach" had been a huge mistake. Her next stint (after failing to win the Ford Foundation fellowship) only deepened the process of disillusionment. Needing financial help to continue work on her Ph.D., she accepted a teaching fellowship at the University of California at Los Angeles, a campus traumatized by waves of violent protests against the Vietnam war and desperate to manifest its good will and sensitivity. UCLA had set up a curriculum in Chicano studies, and Chavez was tapped to teach a class in literature. Her students, she found, were profane, hostile, illiterate, and unwill-

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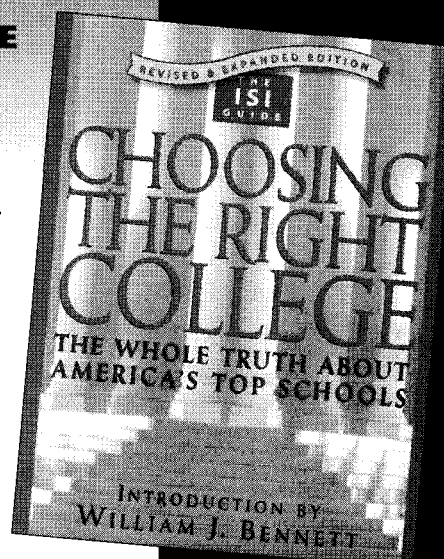
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Gary Rosen, Managing Editor

ing to read the sparse collection of works she had assembled. Most of them finally just walked out, but not before they had harassed their diligent teacher and in some cases even threatened her with violence.

It was in the Washington, D.C. of the 1970's that Chavez finally and unambiguously became a conservative. Her husband had already abandoned an academic career and moved to the capital, and she joined him there without quite knowing what direction her working life would take. After several unsatisfactory jobs—including one at the Democratic National Committee—she finally found an employer she liked: Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Shanker was a man of ideas, many of them indistinguishable—dangerously so, for a union leader—from those of Irving Kristol. Chavez credits him with turning her into a thinking conservative, while also noting that during her eight years at the AFT she herself was gradually moving to the right of her mentor.

And so it happened that in 1980, after dutifully preparing the fall election issue of *American Teacher* magazine, the AFT's house organ, which endorsed Jimmy Carter for President, Chavez found herself voting Republican for the first time in her life. So it also happened that, like William J. Bennett, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and other neoconservative ex-Democrats, she ended up working for Ronald Reagan, first as staff director of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, where she succeeded in getting the agency to reject the loony but increasingly popular notion of "comparable worth," and then as director of public liaison at the White House, where she handled relations with assorted ethnic groups.

A failed campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1986—with characteristic boldness, Chavez had persuaded herself that she could win against

the super-liberal Barbara Mikulski of Maryland—was followed by a highly visible term at the head of U.S. English, an organization working for a constitutional amendment to establish English as the country's official language. Although Chavez's debates with opponents were often emotionally charged—she even began traveling with a bodyguard—the group's views prevailed in much-publicized referendums in Colorado, Arizona, and Florida. During the 1990's she founded an organization of her own, the Center for Equal Opportunity, where she has continued to agitate against separatism, bilingual education, and racial preferences.

The latest and most unfortunate chapter in Chavez's career is also the best known: in early January 2001, she was named by George W. Bush as his choice to be U.S. Secretary of Labor. As she acknowledges in her memoir, she had acquired a lot of enemies over the years—mostly centered in the labor movement and the world of civil-rights activists—and could not afford any slip-ups. Mad-denyingly, she failed to tell her interviewers on Bush's transition team about a Guatemalan woman whom she had sheltered in the early 1990's in an act of pure benevolence. Although not a nanny, a maid, or a cook, the woman was an illegal alien, and taking in illegal aliens was against the law. Chavez felt obliged to withdraw, and did so in a news conference at which the Bush team was conspicuously absent.

WHETHER LINDA Chavez is an "unlikely" conservative, as the title of her book suggests, is a nice question. Her enemies, many of whom have never forgiven her for abandoning the liberal Left, have often charged her with tailoring her views in order to further her career. Actually, it is plain that her career would have advanced much more quickly and smoothly—and profitably—had she retained her liberal credentials and played the game of racial and

ethnic preferences for all it was worth. By going her own way, she has paid a high and something of a lonely price, though she has also had the incomparable satisfaction of being her own woman and of keeping faith with the lessons of her experience.

In doing so, she has also kept faith with the bedrock teachings of her childhood and youth—teachings that, as Chavez herself notes, undoubtedly played a role in predisposing her to conservative ideas. “On most issues,” she writes in connection with her years with Al Shanker and the AFT,

I was still the Catholic schoolgirl, respectful of authority, more comfortable with a fixed moral code, and with a reverence for tradition and decorum. No matter how far I had strayed from the religion of my youth, I had carried it inside me, and it shaped my views on everything—family, popular culture, even politics.

Linda Chavez’s future is hard to predict, but she has never sat still for long. Given her brains and energy, I, for one, expect her Nexis count to keep expanding.

Fire-Breather

*Slander:
Liberal Lies
About the American Right*
by Ann Coulter
Crown. 256 pp. \$25.95

Reviewed by
Gary Rosen

AMONG THE recurring characters on NBC’s acclaimed show *The West Wing*, the most improbable is a sharp-tongued, right-wing lady lawyer who, having bested a

GARY ROSEN is the managing editor of COMMENTARY.

top White House staffer on one of the political talk shows, is invited to join the Democratic administration. Young, blonde, and beautiful, she hates taxes, loves guns, and considers liberals smug and patronizing—yet, when the President calls, she feels duty-bound to serve.

What is improbable in all this is not the basic profile. The character is a composite of such real-life media personalities as Laura Ingraham, Kellyanne Fitzpatrick, the late Barbara Olson, and, of course, the queen of the fair-haired, conservative fire-breathers, Ann Coulter, all of whom rose to prominence as cable-TV talking heads during the Clinton scandals. What makes the character on *The West Wing* utterly incredible, nothing more than the fantasy of an overimaginative screenwriter, is the idea that any of these women, least of all Coulter, would be tolerated for a moment in a den of hungry liberals—or would allow herself to be so easily tamed.

THE FIRST thing to note about Coulter’s latest book, *Slander*, is that it is a best-seller, and for a while this summer even occupied the top slot on several lists. That does not make it a “surprise” best-seller: Coulter has a large and enthusiastic following, and her first book, *High Crimes and Misdemeanors: The Case Against Bill Clinton* (1998), also fared very well. Besides, calling the success of a book by a conservative author a “surprise” is, by Coulter’s lights, one of the countless ways that liberals malign and mistreat the Right, and avoid discussing issues on their merits. As she sets out her thesis in the book’s opening paragraph:

Political “debate” in this country is insufferable. Whether conducted in Congress, on the political talk shows, or played out at dinners and cocktail parties, politics is a nasty sport. At the risk of giving away the ending: it’s all liberals’ fault.

One of the Left’s more pervasive

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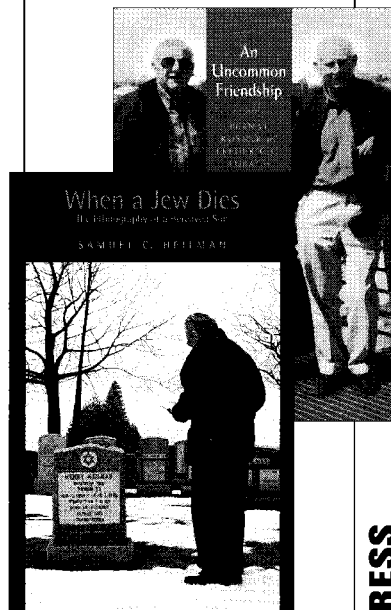
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modes of attack, Coulter asserts, is to distort the very language in which political questions are framed. Thus, in the "dictionary" of the elite press, Republican politicians who oppose their own party are "moderates" or, better still, courageous "mavericks"; a defector on the other side of the aisle, by contrast, wins the epithet of "conservative" Democrat. Similarly, America seems to be rife with "ultraconservatives" and minions of the "far right wing," but to be sorely lacking in "ultras" and "wingers" of the Left. Such labels, Coulter writes, "convey no factual information beyond 'good dog!' and 'bad dog!'"

A more vicious and direct technique of liberal propaganda, according to Coulter, is to paint every prominent Republican—except for the occasional clear-eyed "moderate"—as invincibly stupid. On this view, "Coolidge was dumb, Eisenhower was dumb, Ford was dumb, Nixon was dumb (overshadowed by his pure evil), Quayle (standing in for his boss) was dumb, Reagan was dumb, Bush (43) is dumb." No gaffe is too small to prompt headlines about a conservative politician's supposed intellectual inadequacies, as when candidate George W. Bush could name only one of four (relatively obscure) world leaders in a reporter's pop quiz.

When this particular line of ad-hominem attack is exhausted, Coulter argues, liberals roll out their big guns, accusing conservatives of every kind of cruelty and intolerance. She serves up, among other choice examples, Bill Clinton on Republican social policy: "What they want to do is make war on the kids of this country." Congressman Charles Rangel on Republican fiscal policy: "It's not 'spic' or 'nigger' anymore. They say, 'Let's cut taxes.'" And, notoriously, Senator Edward Kennedy on Republican Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork: "[his] America is a land in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, [and] rogue police could

break down citizens' doors in midnight raids."

Why do liberals resort so readily to "hate-mongering and name-calling" and flee from substantive debate at all costs? In part, Coulter believes, because they can get away with it. With their "hegemonic control" of the mainstream media, they stand virtually unopposed in setting the terms of debate. Theirs is a world in which "being a liberal Democrat is simply not considered partisan," in which virtually everyone pulled the lever twice for Clinton and none doubt the propriety of allowing one-time Democratic hacks like George Stephanopoulos, Tim Russert, and Jeff Greenfield to pose as neutral news commentators.

More fundamentally, Coulter argues, "liberals prefer invective to engagement" because "the public would boil them in oil" if their real views were known. As she sees it, liberalism is the political impulse of rich, over-educated, power-hungry "snobs," who, despite their egalitarian rhetoric, "actually hate working-class Americans." "Secure in the knowledge that their beachfront haciendas will still be standing when the smoke clears," she writes, "they giddily fiddle with the little people's rules and morals."

ANN COULTER is right, at least up to a point. Liberals are, often enough, snotty, insufferable elitists who delight in tarring conservatives with every imaginable sort of nastiness. They are often foolish and self-important, too, which gives Coulter some of her best punch lines. "According to [Al] Gore" in *Earth in the Balance*, she writes, "God was hopping mad about Cain polluting. Cain had 'defiled the ground' with Abel's messy blood. Murder is one thing, but polluting really got God's goat." Or there is this about the press's worshipful treatment of the vacuous feminist icon Gloria Steinem, who, for three decades,

could not get her toenails painted without a major feature spread

Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") Can Israel survive without it?

Many people believe that the "conflict" between Israel and the Palestinians could be resolved if Israel were to consent to the creation of Palestinian state in Gaza and in all or most of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). Even our president has advocated this outcome, contingent on the "good behavior" of the Palestinians. But would the creation of such a state be a solution to the conflict or, just as the Oslo Accord, another illusion that would exacerbate the conflict, rather than terminate it?

What are the facts?

The Root of the conflict. The conflict between Israel and the Arabs is not about borders and not about the Palestinians. The conflict is not about the size of Israel. It is about Israel's very existence. Israel, of whatever size and within whatever boundaries, is unacceptable to the Arabs. In surrendering strategic territory, Israel is gambling with its very life. The PLO still adheres to its infamous "phased plan." It calls for first creating a Palestinian state on any territory vacated by Israel and then using that state to foment a final allied Arab assault against the truncated Jewish state.

The Importance of territory. Many believe that in this age of missiles, territory is of little importance and that Israel should therefore not hesitate to relinquish "land for peace." But that is not the case. The Arab states have acquired over \$50 billion of the most advanced armaments since the end of the Gulf War. And those are not just "conventional" weapons—enormous quantities of tanks, aircraft of all kinds, and much more. The Arab state possess large arsenals of chemical and biological weapons, and all of them work feverishly on the development of their nuclear potential. All of those weapons have only one single purpose: the destruction of the state of Israel. And that goal is not being cancelled for any agreements that Israel may make with the Palestinians. For both "conventional" war and for war of mass destruction, territory and topography are critical for self-defense and deterrence. The mountainous territory of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") is an indispensable line of defense, especially for a country as small as Israel. It totally controls access to Israel's heartland from the east. Israel needs this high ground for defense,

"Without Judea/Samaria (the 'West Bank') Israel would be totally indefensible; therefore, neither the purposes of Israel nor those of the United States would be served by Israel's relinquishing control of the 'West Bank'."

to be able to peer deeply into the enemy's territory and to get early warning of any attack. The high ground allows Israel to detect missiles while they are still in the launch stage and to destroy them, with the Arrow or other sophisticated anti-missile systems. Unlike the U.S., Israel cannot maintain a fleet of nuclear submarines for "second strike" deterrence. But it can maintain dozens of mobile missile launchers safe in underground tunnels hewn into the rock of the Judean mountains.

Would the "West Bank" be demilitarized? Even those who want Israel to retreat to its pre-1967 borders are agreed that the evacuated areas must be demilitarized. But that would be useless. Because the Palestinians will have thousands of trained soldiers, camouflaged

as their police force. In case of war against Israel, these troops could be helicoptered in minutes to their positions, with armored forces reaching them within the same night. In any case, it is highly doubtful that the

surrounding hostile Arab nations would allow such a military vacuum to exist. And finally, there is the matter of terrorism. There are over fifteen Palestinian terror organizations that neither Yassir Arafat nor any other Palestinian authority can control. There would be a constant rain of Katyusha rockets launched into the Tel Aviv area and into the entire coastal plain, which is only nine miles wide at its waist. It contains 80% of Israel's population and of its industrial and military potential. Ben Gurion airport, every incoming and outgoing flight, would be subject to mortar fire or shoulder-held Stinger attack. Does anybody doubt that the Arabs would not exploit that irresistible opportunity?

Without the "West Bank" Israel would be totally indefensible. That is the professional opinion of over 100 U.S. generals and admirals. Israel's strong defensive posture makes it most inadvisable for Israel's enemies to attack her. But once this defensive strength is removed, a coordinated war against Israel can only be a matter of time. The example and fate of Czechoslovakia, which preparatory to the Second World War was dismantled and shorn of its defensive capacity, insistently comes to mind. What does all this mean to the United States? In a part of the world in which our country has the most far-reaching geopolitical stakes, Israel is the only democracy, the only country that is unquestioningly aligned with us. It is the guarantor of American interests in the area. With Israel in a position of weakness, the role of the United States in the area would collapse and radical states such as Syria, Iraq and Iran would dominate. That is why, despite the heady prospect of "peace in our time," neither the purposes of Israel nor those of the United States would be served by Israel's relinquishing control over the "West Bank."

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in a glossy magazine covering the event in laborious and hyperbolic detail. No matter how stunning her failures, a gaggle of media feminists would warmly compliment Steinem for her bravery and wisdom in choosing Hint of Pink over Musty Sunset.

One is tempted, having given Coulter due credit, to move on to the obvious: that *Slander* itself is an outrageous example of the very things she finds so detestable in liberals. The book is relentlessly ad-hominem—the *Today* show host Katie Couric is “the affable Eva Braun of morning TV,” Ted Kennedy a “champion desecrator of life,” Republican turncoat Jim Jeffords a “half-wit.” It gives a free pass to the ideologically like-minded—President Bush is “the consummate wartime commander,” American conservatives are “the most tolerant (and long-suffering) people in the world.” It refuses to recognize arguments or principles on the other side—“the whole point of being a

liberal” is “to feel superior to people with less money.” And, padded out with some 800 endnotes, it pretends to intellectual seriousness where there is none.

One might also lament the frame of mind within the American Right that gives rise to a piece of agit-prop like *Slander*. Liberal media bias is a problem, no doubt, but it hardly warrants the obsessive attention that conservatives often pay to it. Fretting constantly about unfair treatment eventually starts to sound like self-pity, and is especially unbecoming in a political movement that rightly decries the vogue of victimhood. There is also the seemingly self-evident fact that, despite the Left’s “hegemonic control” of the great organs of opinion, conservatives have done pretty well over the last several decades in promoting their ideas and getting their candidates elected.

All of these criticisms would be apt; but in the end, they both take Ann Coulter too seriously and fail

to appreciate her true genius. Coulter is a strange hybrid—part partisan polemicist, part entertainer, all carefully calculated act. And she pulls it off with aplomb, playing the role of the angry, excluded conservative while reaping the rewards of being a blonde-maned, mini-skirted celebrity. What awful penalty did the liberal powers-that-be impose on Coulter for comparing Katie Couric to Hitler’s mistress? An invitation to appear on the *Today* show to confront the accused, and to plug her book.

A recent cartoon in the *New Yorker* shows Coulter standing in Times Square in a pose familiar from one of her widely circulated publicity photos. The caption, a quote from the book, reads, “In this universe, the public square is wall-to-wall liberal propaganda.” Behind her, on every billboard and screen, is the image of the author, airing her complaint. Though the source is undoubtedly liberal, one hesitates to call such treatment slander.

We mourn the death of

William Phillips

1907-2002

editor-in-chief of *Partisan Review*, dear and close friend
of many decades to COMMENTARY and its editors.

**Paul E. Peterson is
director of the Program
on Education Policy and
Governance, Harvard
University; senior fellow,
Hoover Institution; and
member, Hoover's Koret
Task Force on K-12
Education.**

In New York City, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is fighting efforts to restore order to schools. The school board wants teachers to supervise hallways, lunchrooms, and playgrounds because costly but ineffectual "paraprofessionals" don't command respect. But union leaders refuse to cooperate, even though their members work less than four hours a day.

In California, the National Education Association (NEA) is demanding control of school curricula. In Massachusetts, the NEA has fought teacher competency tests clear to the state supreme court. Elsewhere, the AFT and NEA are preventing the formation of union-free charter schools.

As private sector unionism has waned, the NEA and AFT have become the most powerful labor combination in America. They contribute millions to Democratic and Republican candidates for office. Teachers also constitute as many as a quarter of the delegates to the national Democratic conventions. In school board and school bond elections, teachers outvote citizens by large margins. In a bond referendum in Huntington Beach, California, 93 percent of the teachers voted, according to a Stanford study, though overall turnout was 19 percent; in nearby Santa Ana, 88 percent of the teachers voted, as compared to 23 percent of all registrants.

Yet for all this political influence, unions do not protect the earnings of the many good, hardworking teachers. In 1940, female teachers made better than 60 percent of that earned by average college-educated women; by 1990, they were earning 40 percent. Among males, salaries slipped from 52 to 33 percent of the college-educated average.

As pay has fallen, so has teacher quality. According to the Department of Labor, 50 percent of women entering teaching in the 1970s received high scores on an educational achievement test. Twenty years later, high-scoring female teachers constituted 10 percent of the total. For male teachers, the drop in high scorers was from 20 to 10 percent.

So what's gone wrong? Powerful unions should be fighting for wages that attract the best and the brightest. Part of the problem is insistence on uniform pay, whereby leaders resist attempts to reward teachers of special merit or pay more for those who have skills that are in short supply. More money is given only to those teachers with years of experience or added credentials. Because teacher effectiveness generally declines after five years, and teacher credentials have been proven meaningless, a disconnect exists between service rendered and compensation received. Thus, it makes little sense to pay employees more.

School boards and unions also take the line of least resistance by handing out more rights and less work rather than increasing teachers pay. Indeed, it was to keep wage demands down that the New York school board agreed to give hallway supervision to the paraprofessionals.

Moreover, ineffectual teachers make for loyal union members. And when ineffective teachers abound, more are needed: the ratio of pupils to teachers nationwide plunged from twenty-two to seventeen between 1970 and 1995. More teachers, more dues, more campaign contributions, more power, more rights—lower performance. No wonder lawmakers are beginning to talk accountability.

— Paul E. Peterson

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Improving Access to Innovative Medicines

by Henry A. McKinnell, Jr., Ph.D.

Trends of the past few years have drawn a great deal of attention to the research-based pharmaceutical industry, both positive and negative. On the positive side, the discovery of breakthrough medicines is making it possible to effectively treat an ever-wider range of health conditions. Increasingly, the substitution of new therapies for less effective and more invasive treatments *reduces the cost of being healthy* to individuals, to healthcare systems, and to society. As a result of advances in pharmaceutical therapy, people have choices and opportunities for healthy living that were previously unavailable.

The increasing use of medicines, however, has also led to increasing concerns about the affordability of new treatments. The growth in *spending* on prescription drugs has often been mistaken for growth in prescription *prices*. For the most part, spending has risen not because of rising prices but because the quantity of medicines people use has increased substantially. Furthermore, as advances in science such as the decoding of the Human Genome lead to further discoveries, and as the world's population ages, pressure for even greater use of medicines is likely to continue. A key challenge of the future will be to assure continued progress in discovering treatments for disease, while at the same time assuring access to needed medicines.

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Henry A. McKinnell, Jr., Ph.D. is chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Pfizer Inc.

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